

Proposed changes to councils in Warwickshire



North Warwickshire
Borough Council

Nuneaton
&
Bedworth



Report of Public Engagement: Final

Opinion Research Services

October 2025

Opinion Research Services

The Strand Swansea SA1 1AF

01792 535300 | www.ors.org.uk | info@ors.org.uk

As with all our studies, findings from this report are subject to Opinion Research Services' Standard Terms and Conditions of Contract.

Any press release or publication of the findings of this report requires the advance approval of ORS. Such approval will only be refused on the grounds of inaccuracy or misrepresentation

This study was conducted in accordance with ISO 20252:2019, ISO 9001:2015, and ISO 27001:2022

© Copyright October 2025

Contents

1. Executive Summary	5
Introduction.....	5
Devolution and reorganisation	5
The commission	5
The nature of public consultation	5
Key themes: the current two-tier system and the principle of unitary authorities	6
Key themes: number of unitary authorities	7
Key themes: North/South	8
Key themes: additional feedback	9
2. Introduction	10
Overview of the engagement.....	10
Local government in Warwickshire	10
Devolution and reorganisation.....	10
The commission.....	11
Nature of engagement	13
The report.....	14
3. Engagement Questionnaire	15
The open engagement questionnaire	15
Duplicate and co-ordinated responses	15
Respondent profile.....	15
Geographical spread of respondents	17
Interpretation of the data	19
Main Findings	20
Awareness of current council services and views on making efficiencies	20
Views on making efficiencies	21
Views on reducing the number of councils.....	22
Views on the criteria that should inform decision-making	24
Views on the proposal for two unitary councils	25
Views on the areas to be covered by each proposed new council	27
Respondents' comments.....	28
Engagement Questionnaire: Organisation Responses	39
Overview	39
Main findings.....	40
Additional comments made by organisations	40
4. Focus Groups with General Residents	43
Overview	43
Main findings from residents' focus groups.....	43
5. Focus Group with Service Users	51
Overview	51
Main findings.....	51

6. Town and Parish Council workshops	55
Overview	55
Main Findings from Town & Parish Council workshops	55
7. Business Forum	59
Overview	59
Main findings from Business Representatives' forum	59
8. Voluntary and Community Sector Workshop.....	62
Overview	62
Main findings from VCS focus group	62
9. Key Stakeholder Interviews	68
Overview	68
Main findings from key stakeholder interviews.....	68
10. Figures	73

The ORS Project Team

Project Design and management

Kester Holmes

Kelly Lock

Qualitative research delivery

Kelly Lock

Dr Emma Price

Angharad Davies

Fieldwork and data coding management

Max Davies

Ellen Fitzpatrick

Data analysis

Richard Harris

Sheng Yang

Peter Maggs

Reporting

Kelly Lock

Alys Thomas

Matt Lewis-Richards

Dr Emma Price

1. Executive Summary

Introduction

- 1.1 Warwickshire's councils are currently arranged in a two-tier, with some services provided by Warwickshire County Council and some provided by the five district and borough councils (North Warwickshire Borough Council, Nuneaton and Bedworth District Council, Rugby Borough Council, Warwick District Council, and Stratford-on-Avon District Council).
- 1.2 Each of the councils is independent, has its own political leadership and senior management team, and sets its own share of the council tax bill. Together, they currently have 257 councillors.

Devolution and reorganisation

- 1.3 In December 2024, the government published a Devolution White Paper, stating that all remaining two-tier areas in England should eventually be restructured into single-tier unitary authorities to make local government more streamlined and sustainable. The government invited all six of the councils across Warwickshire to work together on a plan to achieve this.
- 1.4 North Warwickshire Borough Council, Nuneaton and Bedworth District Council, Warwick District Council, and Stratford-on-Avon District Council engaged with thousands of residents, business and stakeholders, and collaborated on an interim plan that would abolish the existing councils and create the 'North/South' model. This model would see the creation of two unitary authorities:
 - » **North Warwickshire**, covering the areas currently served by North Warwickshire Borough Council, Nuneaton and Bedworth District Council, and Rugby Borough Council.
 - » **South Warwickshire**, covering the areas currently served by Warwick District Council and Stratford-on-Avon District Council.

The commission

- 1.5 Opinion Research Services (ORS) was appointed by North Warwickshire Borough Council, Nuneaton and Bedworth District Council, Warwick District Council, and Stratford-on-Avon District Council (henceforth 'the councils') to advise on and independently manage and report important aspects of the comprehensive public engagement programme.
- 1.6 The formal engagement period was launched on 7th August and ended on 14th September 2025. During this period, residents and stakeholders were invited to provide feedback through an online engagement questionnaire (open to all); paper and accessible versions of the questionnaire; public focus groups; workshops with various stakeholder types; and in-depth interviews with key stakeholders.

The nature of public consultation

- 1.7 Accountability means that public authorities should give an account of their plans and take into account public views: they should conduct fair and accessible engagement while reporting the outcomes openly and considering them fully.

- 1.8 This does not mean that the majority views should automatically decide public policy; and the popularity or unpopularity of draft proposals should not displace professional and political judgement about what is the right or best decision in the circumstances. The levels of, and reasons for, public support or opposition are very important, but as considerations to be taken into account, not as factors that necessarily determine authorities' decisions. Above all, public bodies have to consider the relevance and cogency of the arguments put forward during public engagement processes, not just count heads.
- 1.9 For the public bodies considering the outcomes of public engagement, the key question is not "*Which proposal has most support?*" but, "*Are the reasons for the popularity or unpopularity of the proposals cogent?*" In this context, it was essential that this important engagement programme should include both 'open' and deliberative elements, allowing many people to take part via the open questionnaire and residents' survey while promoting informed engagement via the deliberative focus groups, forums, and the in-depth interviews.

Note on the quantitative activities

- 1.10 Open questionnaires are important forms of engagement in being inclusive and giving people an opportunity to express their views; but they are not random sample surveys of a given population - so they cannot normally be expected to be representative of the general balance of opinion. For example, younger age groups are usually under-represented while older age groups tend to be over-represented; and more motivated groups or areas are also typically over-represented compared with others.

Key themes: the current two-tier system and the principle of unitary authorities

Quantitative feedback

- 1.11 Overall, seven-in-ten individual questionnaire respondents (70%) indicated that they feel very or fairly informed about the services provided by councils in their area, and over four-in-five (83%) agreed (i.e. either 'strongly' agreed or 'tended to' agree) with the principle that the councils should pursue opportunities to streamline and make efficiencies, while maintaining good services.
- 1.12 Additionally, just over half (54%) of respondents agreed, in principle, with the Government's requirement to replace the current system with a smaller number of unitary councils; however, a third (33%) disagreed.
- 1.13 Another question sought feedback on five criteria¹ that are likely to influence decision-making, by asking respondents to give each criterion a score from 0 to 10. When averaged, all five criteria attracted a high overall score, although a little more importance was attached to "quality" and "accountability" (both with an average score of 9.3 out of 10), and a little less to "local identity" (an average score of 8.3 out of 10).
- 1.14 An open-ended question allowed questionnaire respondents to provide further feedback on the proposals. In relation to the principle of introducing unitary authorities, there was some support for achieving efficiencies and better value for money. Nonetheless, various concerns were expressed around a loss of accountability, the difficulties of managing competing priorities (particularly between urban and rural areas), a loss of local knowledge, and the possibility of services becoming less accessible for residents.

¹ The five criteria were: accountability, quality, local identity, access and value for money

Deliberative feedback

- 1.15 Residents and Service Users gave mixed views on the principle of the reorganisation and were largely undecided. Most agreed it would create cost savings, reduce duplication, and provide the opportunity to streamline services. Others said it could be an opportunity to share expertise from staff across a wider area than is currently possible. Businesses, VCS, and key stakeholder representatives supported the principle of reorganisation for the aforementioned reasons and to simplify their dealings with the council, though most said their existing relationships with the various councils are already positive.
- 1.16 Concerns among all groups were that smaller populations would receive less focus from services and councillors, potentially impacting the quality of service that residents receive. One Service User described difficulty obtaining a suitable home in their area through social housing and questioned whether a new council covering a large geography might mean they could in future be expected to accept housing in more distant areas.
- 1.17 Town and Parish Councillors were concerned that the changes would increase their existing responsibilities. This was a concern to many who said that recruitment for the role is already difficult enough. One councillor sought clarity on how budgeting for the new council(s) would be affected by the reorganisation. They suggested that organising the new budget in a way that is deemed fair and reasonable would be difficult and that the new council would need to ensure transparency around the issue to maintain local trust.

Key themes: number of unitary authorities

Quantitative feedback

- 1.18 Over seven-in-ten individuals responding to the questionnaire (73%) agreed with the proposal for two unitary councils to run local government across Warwickshire, while just over a fifth (22%) disagreed.
- 1.19 Agreement was somewhat higher in the two districts comprising the proposed South Warwickshire unitary council (79% in Stratford-on-Avon and 76% in Warwick) compared to those areas making up the proposed North Warwickshire council (66% in North Warwickshire, 63% in Nuneaton and Bedworth, 35% in Rugby²).
- 1.20 Having two councils (e.g. covering north and south), many respondents suggested, would better reflect differences between areas. Some respondents who had concerns about unitarization and reducing councils in general, felt that having two might be preferable to one and help mitigate some of their concerns. Specific concerns expressed about a single unitary council were that it would be too large and remote, lack accountability and not treat all areas equitably.
- 1.21 However, other respondents expressed support for a single unitary council, feeling this would minimise duplication and help to achieve greater economies of scale. Some respondents also expressed concern about the potential impacts of disaggregating county-wide services such as social care and education in the event of two councils being created.
- 1.22 Occasionally, respondents also advocated for a larger number of unitary councils e.g. three.

² Although note that this result is based on a low number of responses (31) from Rugby.

Deliberative feedback

- 1.23 Most participants in all groups preferred to have two unitary authorities, agreeing that it would better cater to the different needs of areas across Warwickshire and ensure that the more local focus from services is retained, improving service quality. One resident argued that having two authorities would give Warwickshire more 'bargaining power' within a strategic authority also.
- 1.24 Those who preferred to have one authority said it would provide better cost savings and efficiencies; more consistent service delivery; and create a bigger 'pot' of funds to focus on areas with the highest needs. Business representatives added that having one authority could ensure that strategic planning was more consistent.

Key themes: North/South

Quantitative feedback

- 1.25 Overall, around three quarters (74%) of questionnaire respondents agreed with the areas to be covered by the proposed unitary councils, while just under a fifth (18%) disagreed.
- 1.26 Again, agreement appeared to be higher in the districts making up the proposed South Warwickshire unitary (80% in Stratford-on-Avon and 79% in Warwick) compared to those making up the proposed North Warwickshire unitary (64% in Nuneaton and Bedworth and 61% in North Warwickshire, and only 23% in Rugby³).
- 1.27 Among respondents who provided further feedback, there was a widespread sense that the North and South of the county do have distinctive characteristics e.g. social, economic and political, which were felt by many to strengthen the case for having two unitary councils.
- 1.28 Nonetheless, there were some reservations, including concerns that the proposal risks creating an 'affluent council (i.e. in the south) and a 'poor' council (i.e. in the north) which might risk exacerbating inequalities. There was also some feedback that all (or, alternatively, parts) of Rugby might belong better in the proposed South Warwickshire unitary. A few suggested more radical configurations involving neighbouring areas outside Warwickshire.
- 1.29 A few had specific concerns about the creation of a South Warwickshire unitary council, noting strong urban and rural differences, and citing unsuccessful attempts to combine the two councils in the past.

Deliberative feedback

- 1.30 Participants across all groups voiced their support for the North/South model to varying degrees. Numerous residents said they would feel more comfortable being represented by a council with the population sizes suggested under the model, rather than under one council with the entire combined population of Warwickshire. Linked with this, North Warwickshire residents felt that the North/South model would best preserve focus on their local areas, benefiting the services they receive.

³ Although again note that this is based on a low number of responses from Rugby.

- 1.31 Town and Parish Councillors questioned whether service delivery and quality would vary between North and South if Warwickshire if the North/South model were implemented, and what controls will be in place to ensure service delivery is high quality across both authorities.

Key themes: additional feedback

Quantitative feedback

- 1.32 The remaining open-ended feedback from questionnaire respondents covered a range of topics. Various concerns were expressed around accessibility, with respondents noting that access can already be challenging for some residents (e.g. those in rural areas, some older people, those with low incomes) and therefore any further reductions in council sites may have a disproportionately negative impact.
- 1.33 A few respondents expressed strong concerns about possible impacts on the most vulnerable if services such as social care, safeguarding services and SEND (special educational needs) provision were disrupted.
- 1.34 Other concerns were expressed around: impacts on partnership working (e.g. with the Police and Fire and Resue Service), workforce issues associated with reorganisation (e.g. redundancies), and on council tax levels and the equalisation process.
- 1.35 Other feedback concerned local decision-making e.g. whether town and parish councils might take on an enhanced role, or some new bodies (e.g. area committees) might be created.
- 1.36 In terms of service delivery across a wider area, a small number of respondents queried whether two new unitary councils might be able to share some services, or going further, whether some services (e.g. social care and SEND) might be commissioned over a larger area in future, and shared by multiple councils across the region.
- 1.37 There were also some queries about how the proposal would fit into wider devolution e.g. how it might impact new or existing strategic authorities, and which strategic authorities the new councils might be part of.

Deliberative feedback

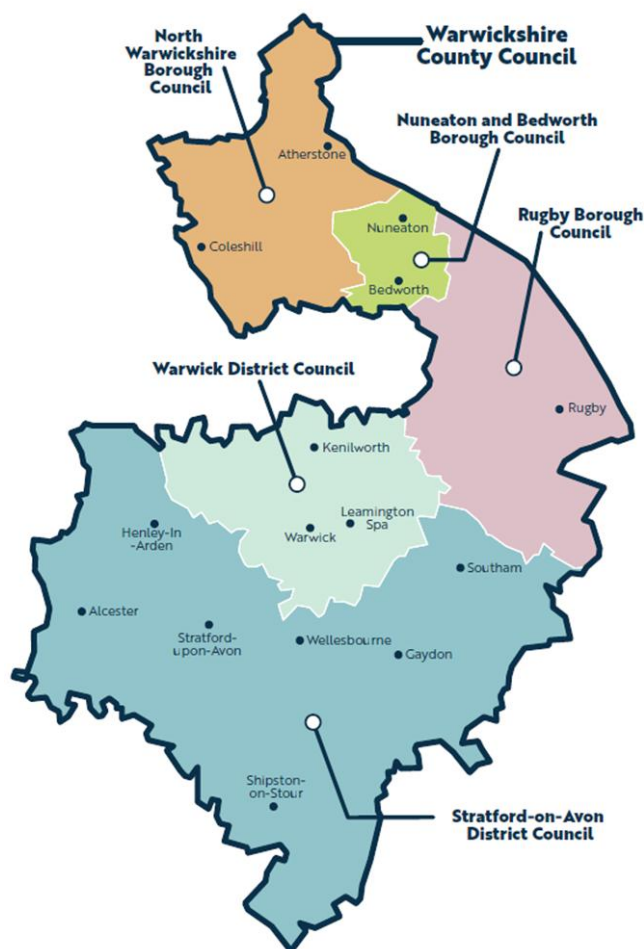
- 1.38 A few residents and Service Users voiced some frustration, and felt that more detail is needed for them to understand the impact of the reduction in councillors; the impacts of disaggregation; and the impacts on council tax. One resident felt that a decision on how the new council(s) would be formed had already been made, whilst another suggested the motivation for the changes was to increase council tax revenue. Concerns around council tax were also briefly raised during one of the Town and Parish council workshops.
- 1.39 Many participants in the Town and Parish Councillors' group wanted more detail on the potential plans for Warwickshire's place within a strategic authority, but praised the councils for their communication to date regarding the changes. Key stakeholders stressed that they would work closely with any new authorities to deliver the best outcomes for all areas, regardless of local government structures.

2. Introduction

Overview of the engagement

Local government in Warwickshire

- 2.1 In addition to many local parish and town councils, there are currently six councils providing services across Warwickshire: five district and borough councils, and Warwickshire County Council. These councils are responsible for a range of local services from housing, planning, and social care for children and adults; to collecting waste and recycling, maintaining roads, and running libraries.
- 2.2 The councils in Warwickshire are currently arranged in a two-tier structure with some services provided by Warwickshire County Council and some provided by the five district and borough councils (North Warwickshire Borough Council, Nuneaton and Bedworth District Council, Rugby Borough Council, Warwick District Council, and Stratford-on-Avon District Council). The councils cover an overall population of 632,207.
- 2.3 Each of the six councils is independent, has its own political leadership and senior management team, and sets its own share of the council tax bill. Together, they currently have 257 councillors.



Devolution and reorganisation

- 2.4 The government's devolution agenda is about giving more powers and funding to regions. In December 2024, it published the Devolution White Paper⁴, in which it stated that all remaining two-tier areas in England should be restructured into single-tier unitary authorities to make local government more streamlined and sustainable. The government invited the six councils across Warwickshire to work on a proposal to achieve this.
- 2.5 At the same time, the government also wants to create a network of Strategic Authorities, which would comprise two or more unitary authorities and be run by an elected mayor. These Authorities would be empowered to make decisions on strategic issues that cross unitary authority boundaries, such as transport, housing and economic growth, ensuring a more co-ordinated and long-term approach. Strategic Authorities would also receive funding direct from government for large scale schemes and projects.

⁴ Available at www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-devolution-white-paper-power-and-partnership-foundations-for-growth/english-devolution-white-paper

- 2.6 As a result of this, North Warwickshire Borough Council, Nuneaton and Bedworth District Council, Warwick District Council, and Stratford-on-Avon District Council (henceforth ‘the councils’) engaged with thousands of residents, businesses and stakeholders, and collaborated on an interim plan that would abolish the existing councils and create the ‘North/South’ model. This model would see the creation of two unitary authorities:
- » **North Warwickshire**, covering the areas currently served by North Warwickshire Borough Council, Nuneaton and Bedworth District Council and Rugby Borough Council.
 - » **South Warwickshire**, covering the areas currently served by Warwick District Council and Stratford-on-Avon District Council.
- 2.7 At the same time, different proposals for this area are separately being put forward by Warwickshire County Council⁵ and Rugby Borough Council had not decided on a preferred option at the time of this study. The eventual make-up of unitary authorities in the area will be the decision of the government.
- 2.8 Prior to finalising and submitting their full proposal to government in November 2025, the councils have undertaken the comprehensive public engagement exercise reported here to gather more data and evidence; and help ensure that the right decision is made for everyone in Warwickshire.

The commission

- 2.9 Opinion Research Services (ORS) is a spin-out company from Swansea University with a UK-wide reputation for social research, particularly major statutory consultations (including on local government reorganisations in Buckinghamshire, Dorset, Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire and Oxfordshire) and engagement processes. ORS was appointed by the councils to advise on and independently manage and report important aspects of the comprehensive public engagement programme.
- 2.10 The formal engagement period was launched on 7th August 2025 and ended on 14th September 2025. During this period, residents and stakeholders were invited to provide feedback through a wide range of routes, including all the following:
- » An engagement questionnaire: the questionnaire was available online and paper questionnaires were available on request
 - » Six in-depth telephone interviews with the key strategic stakeholders
 - » Four focus groups with members of the public (one in each of the Warwickshire districts and boroughs, except Rugby)
 - » Five workshops and forums with external stakeholders: local business representatives, vulnerable service users, Town and Parish Councils x2, and Voluntary and Community Sector representatives

Open engagement questionnaire

- 2.11 The primary form of quantitative engagement was the open engagement questionnaire, which was available for anyone to complete - reached via a dedicated website (<https://shapingourcouncils.co.uk>) promoted via the councils’ individual website, or by completing a paper version. The questionnaire included questions about the principle of reducing the number of existing councils, the criteria that ought to be considered as

⁵ Warwickshire County Council has put forward a proposal for one unitary authority representing the whole of Warwickshire. See: [Update on Local Government Reorganisation - Warwickshire County Council](#) and [Final proposal](#)

part of any reorganisation, support or opposition to the North/South Warwickshire proposal, and alternative suggestions and further comments.

- 2.12 Open questionnaires are important forms of engagement in being inclusive and giving people an opportunity to express their views; but they are not random sample surveys of a given population - so they cannot normally be expected to be representative of the general balance of opinion. For example, younger age groups are usually under-represented while older age groups tend to be over-represented; and more motivated groups or areas are also typically over-represented compared with others. For example, the proportion of responses from respondents in districts in the south of Warwickshire (around 83%) was far greater than the actual proportion of the population (48%); and conversely respondents from the districts and boroughs in the north of Warwickshire (around 17% of questionnaire responses), were generally underrepresented, relative to the size of their populations (52% combined). These differences should be borne in mind when reviewing the findings.
- 2.13 In total, 2,334 responses were received, including 2,312 individual responses and 22 on behalf of organisations.

Deliberative engagement

- 2.14 The engagement meetings reported here used a 'deliberative' approach, whereby focus group/forum/workshop participants were presented with the relevant contextual information; and given the opportunity to 'deliberate' the issues in question before their considered opinions were sought. Sessions like this offer opportunities for clear presentations of the proposals and evidence; questions and clarification of any ambiguous or difficult points; and for participants to think through their responses while having an opportunity to listen to the evidence and the views of others.
- 2.15 All focus groups and forums lasted for between 1.5 and 2 hours and began with an ORS presentation to provide standardised information about: the current council set-up across Warwickshire; the need for change; and the North/South model and its implications. Participants were encouraged to ask questions throughout, and the meetings were thorough and truly deliberative in listening to and responding openly to a wide range of evidence and issues.

Focus groups with residents

- 2.16 Four online focus groups were held with 35 randomly selected residents: one in each of the Warwickshire boroughs/districts except for Rugby Borough Council. The schedule of meetings and attendance levels are shown below.

Table 1: Resident focus groups (area, time and date, and number of attendees)

Group	Time and Date	Number of Attendees
Stratford-on-Avon	Tuesday 2 nd September 2025, 6:30pm – 8:15pm	7
Warwick	Wednesday 3 rd September 2025, 6:30pm – 8:15pm	10
Nuneaton and Bedworth	Tuesday 9 th September 2025, 6:30pm – 8:15pm	8
North Warwickshire	Wednesday 11 th September 2025, 6:30pm – 8:15pm	10
TOTAL		35

- 2.17 The borough/district-based groups were recruited by Acumen Field Ltd, a specialist recruitment agency, who initially sent out a screening questionnaire to a database of contacts and, more widely, on social media

platforms, targeting the relevant areas. The list of potential contacts was then further refined to establish an initial pool of plausible recruits. The possible recruits were contacted by telephone, asked to complete a more detailed screening questionnaire, and where they matched the required quota targets and other requirements, were recruited to attend the relevant focus group. All necessary details were provided in a confirmation email, and all recruits were telephoned in the days immediately prior to the events, to confirm their attendance (with replacements sought for any late drop-outs).

- 2.18 Although, like all other forms of qualitative engagement, deliberative focus groups and forums cannot be certified as statistically representative samples of public opinion, the meetings reported here gave diverse members of the public the opportunity to participate actively. Because the meetings were inclusive, the outcomes are broadly indicative of how informed opinion would incline, if similar discussions were undertaken with the overall population.

Forums and workshops with stakeholders

- 2.19 For most of the forums and workshops, initial invitations were issued by the council, and subsequent attendance arrangements organised by ORS. However, participants at the Service User group were recruited directly by ORS based on indicating use of relevant services within the engagement questionnaire. A fifth participant for the Service Users group was unable to attend on the day, and instead took part in a 1-1 telephone interview with an ORS researcher. Therefore, although the table below shows that four people took part in the Service Users group, five service users were spoken to in total.
- 2.20 The schedule of events and attendance levels can be seen in the table below.

Table 2: Stakeholder focus groups (area, time and date, and number of attendees)

Group	Time and Date	Number of Attendees
Voluntary and Community Sector	Wednesday 3 rd September 2025, 10am – 12pm	5
Town and Parish Council Forum (1)	Thursday 4 th September 2025, 4pm – 6pm	13
Business representatives	Wednesday 10 th September 2025, 9:30am – 11am	3
Town and Parish Council Forum (2)	Thursday 11 th September 2025, 4pm – 6pm	14
Service Users	Thursday 11 th September 2025, 6:30pm – 8:15pm	4
TOTAL		39

- 2.21 Attendance levels were reasonable, and the well-informed parish and town council representatives took a very active interest in the issues and asked many questions. In fact, most of them were familiar with the general local government reorganisation debate and had formed opinions on the issues before attending the workshops.

Nature of engagement

Proportional and fair

- 2.22 The key good practice requirements for proper engagement programmes (as with formal engagement programmes) are that they should:
- » Be conducted at a formative stage, before decisions are taken

- » Allow sufficient time for people to participate and respond
- » Provide the public and stakeholders with enough background information to allow them to consider the issues and any proposals intelligently and critically
- » Be properly taken into consideration before decisions are finally taken.

2.23 As a well-established and specialist social research practice with wide-ranging experience of controversial statutory consultations and engagement processes across the UK, ORS is able to certify that the process undertaken by the councils meets these standards. Overall, ORS has no doubt that the engagement programme has been conscientious, competent and comprehensive in eliciting opinions. It was open, accessible and fair to all stakeholders across Warwickshire; and it conforms with 'best practice' in both its scale and the balance of elements and methods used. The engagement was also proportional to the importance of the issues.

Nature of engagement

- 2.24 Accountability means that public authorities should give an account of their plans and take into account public views: they should conduct fair and accessible engagement while reporting the outcomes openly and considering them fully.
- 2.25 This does not mean that the majority views should automatically decide public policy; and the popularity or unpopularity of draft proposals should not displace professional and political judgement about what is the right or best decision in the circumstances. The levels of, and reasons for, public support or opposition are very important, but as considerations to be taken into account, not as factors that necessarily determine authorities' decisions. Above all, public bodies have to consider the relevance and cogency of the arguments put forward during public engagement processes, not just count heads.
- 2.26 For the public bodies considering the outcomes of public engagement, the key question is not "*Which proposal has most support?*" but "*Are the reasons for the popularity or unpopularity of the proposals cogent?*" In this context, it was essential that this important engagement programme should include both 'open' and deliberative elements to allow many people to take part via the open questionnaire and residents' survey while promoting informed engagement via the deliberative focus groups and forums, and the in-depth interviews.

The report

- 2.27 This report reviews the sentiments and judgements of respondents and participants on the councils' North/South model and on the local government reorganisation generally. Verbatim quotations are used, in indented italics, not because we agree or disagree with them - but for their vividness in capturing recurrent points of view. ORS does not endorse any opinions, but seeks only to portray them accurately and clearly. The report is an interpretative summary of the issues raised by participants.
- 2.28 ORS is clear that its role is to analyse and explain the opinions and arguments of the many different interests participating in the engagement, but not to 'make a case' for any option or variant. In this report, we seek to profile the opinions and arguments of those who have responded to the engagement, but not to make any recommendations as to how the reported results should be used.

3. Engagement Questionnaire

The open engagement questionnaire

- 3.1 The four Warwickshire councils (i.e. North Warwickshire, Nuneaton and Bedworth, Stratford-on-Avon and Warwick) developed an engagement document outlining the background to the proposed changes, along with details of the councils' proposals for two new unitary authorities covering North and South Warwickshire. To obtain feedback around the various issues outlined in this document, an engagement questionnaire was then designed by ORS in conjunction with the councils.
- 3.2 The questionnaire included questions intended to examine views on the case for change, unitary councils in principle, and the criteria that ought to be considered as part of any reorganisation. It also asked respondents' views about the potential introduction of two new unitary councils (i.e. the proposed North Warwickshire and South Warwickshire) and the areas that would be covered by each of these. Additional sections allowed respondents to make further comments or any alternative suggestions, and captured information about the type of response being submitted and respondents' demographics.
- 3.3 The engagement document and questionnaire were available throughout the entire engagement period, from 7th August until 14th September 2025. The councils produced a dedicated website (www.shapingourcouncils.co.uk) to host information about the proposals and to link to the online version of the questionnaire. Paper versions were also provided to the councils to distribute to those who might be unable to fill in the questionnaire online.
- 3.4 The engagement questionnaire could be completed by individuals and on behalf of organisations. In total, 2,334 responses were received, including 2,312 individual responses and 22 on behalf of organisations.

Duplicate and co-ordinated responses

- 3.5 It is important that engagement questionnaires are open and accessible to all, while being alert to the possibility of multiple completions (by the same people) distorting the analysis. Therefore, while making it easy to complete the survey online, ORS monitors the IP addresses through which surveys are completed. A similar analysis of "cookies" was also undertaken – where responses originated from users on the same computer using the same browser and the same credentials (e.g. user account). None were considered to be identical responses attempting to skew the results. A small number of partially complete responses were duplicates of other fully completed responses, and therefore after careful study of these, 19 partial responses were excluded (where it was clear that respondents had subsequently returned to the questionnaire to submit a full response, which superseded the initial partial response). Similarly, no paper copies of questionnaires returned to ORS were considered to be duplicated responses.

Respondent profile

- 3.6 Table 1 provides a breakdown of the respondent profile from the 2,312 individuals who responded either online or by post to the open engagement questionnaire. Where available, figures for the overall population of Warwickshire are also provided for comparison. These are based on ONS Census 2021 data and are used as a comparator to give some general indication of how well the response profile of the questionnaire matches the wider population. An asterisk has been used to denote percentages greater than zero, but less than half of one percent.

Table 2: Socio-demographic characteristics for the open questionnaire and population of Warwickshire aged 18+ (Note: Percentages may not sum due to rounding)

Characteristic		All responses		Population aged 18+
		Number of Responses	% of Valid Responses	
BY AGE	Under 25	19	1	9
	25 to 34	123	6	16
	35 to 44	238	12	16
	45 to 54	327	17	17
	55 to 64	478	25	16
	65 to 74	455	24	13
	75 and over ⁶	265	14	12
	Total valid responses	1,905	100	100
	<i>Not known</i>	407	-	-
BY GENDER	Male	941	50	51
	Female	940	50	49
	Prefer to self-describe	10	1	-
	Total valid responses	1,891	100	100
	<i>Not known</i>	421	-	-
BY ETHNIC GROUP	White	1,765	96	90
	Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	20	1	1
	Asian or Asian British	35	2	6
	Black, African, Caribbean or Black British	5	*	1
	Any other ethnic group	8	*	1
	Total valid responses	1,833	100	100
	<i>Not known</i>	479	-	-
BY DISABILITY	Has a disability	211	11	19
	No disability	1,658	89	81
	Total valid responses	1,869	100	100
	<i>Not known</i>	443	-	-

Table 3: Breakdown of individual responses to the open questionnaire by whether respondents identified as councillors or employees of a local authority in Warwickshire or a neighbouring area (Note: Percentages may not sum due to rounding)

Characteristic		All Responses	
		Number of Responses	% of Valid Responses
BY COUNCILLOR	County/District/Town/Parish councillor	81	4
	Not a councillor	1,856	96
	Total valid responses	1,937	100
	<i>Not known</i>	375	-
BY LOCAL AUTHORITY EMPLOYEE	Employed by a local authority in Warks or neighbouring area	184	10
	Not employed by a local authority in Warks or neighbouring area	1663	90
	Total valid responses	1,847	100
	<i>Not known</i>	465	-

⁶ This includes 245 individuals aged 75 to 84 and 20 individuals aged 85 and over

- 3.7 Of the 81 councillors responding to the engagement, 5 were county councillors, 19 were district or borough councillors, and 68 were town/parish councillors⁷.
- 3.8 Of the 184 local authority employees who responded, most (109) were employees of the district or borough councils in Warwickshire, although 32 were County Council employees and 38 worked for other organisations.

Geographical spread of respondents

- 3.9 Table 3 below provides a breakdown of individual responses to the questionnaire by district/borough, where known (i.e. where a postcode was provided). Figures for the adult population (aged 18+) of Warwickshire are also outlined for comparison, based on ONS Census 2021 data.
- 3.10 As can be seen in the table above, more than three-fifths (62%) of responses from within Warwickshire were submitted by respondents from Stratford-on-Avon, despite its actual population comprising only a quarter (25%) of the overall Warwickshire total. The proportion of responses originating from Warwick district (21%) was broadly in line with the population figure (23%).
- 3.11 Respondents from the districts and boroughs making up the proposed North Warwickshire unitary council, on the other hand, were generally underrepresented in the questionnaire response, relative to the size of their populations. Collectively, North Warwickshire, Nuneaton and Bedworth, and Rugby make up just over half of Warwickshire's overall population; however, only around 17% of the questionnaire responses originated from these areas.
- 3.12 Nuneaton and Bedworth (8% of questionnaire responses) and Rugby (2% of responses) were particularly underrepresented relative to the sizes of their populations (22% and 19% respectively), although it is worth noting that Rugby council did not promote the engagement as they had not decided a formal position on local government reorganisation.

Table 4: Breakdown of individual responses to the open questionnaire by local authority area and comparison to the population of Warwickshire aged 18+ (Note: Percentages may not sum due to rounding)

Characteristic		All Responses		Population aged 18+
		Number of Responses	% of Valid Responses	
BY LOCAL AUTHORITY	North Warwickshire	161	8	11
	Nuneaton and Bedworth	135	7	22
	Rugby	32	2	19
	Warwick	395	21	23
	Stratford-on-Avon	1,174	62	25
	Total Warks responses	1,897	100	100
	<i>Other</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>
	<i>Not known</i>	<i>396</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>

- 3.13 Table 4 below presents a breakdown of questionnaire responses by whether respondents live rural or urban areas and also by IMD quintile. These are compared to the population using relevant secondary data (Census 2021 for urban and rural, and 2020 Mid-Year Population Estimates for IMD).

⁷ A small number indicated they were more than one type of councillor; hence the sum of these numbers is greater than 81.

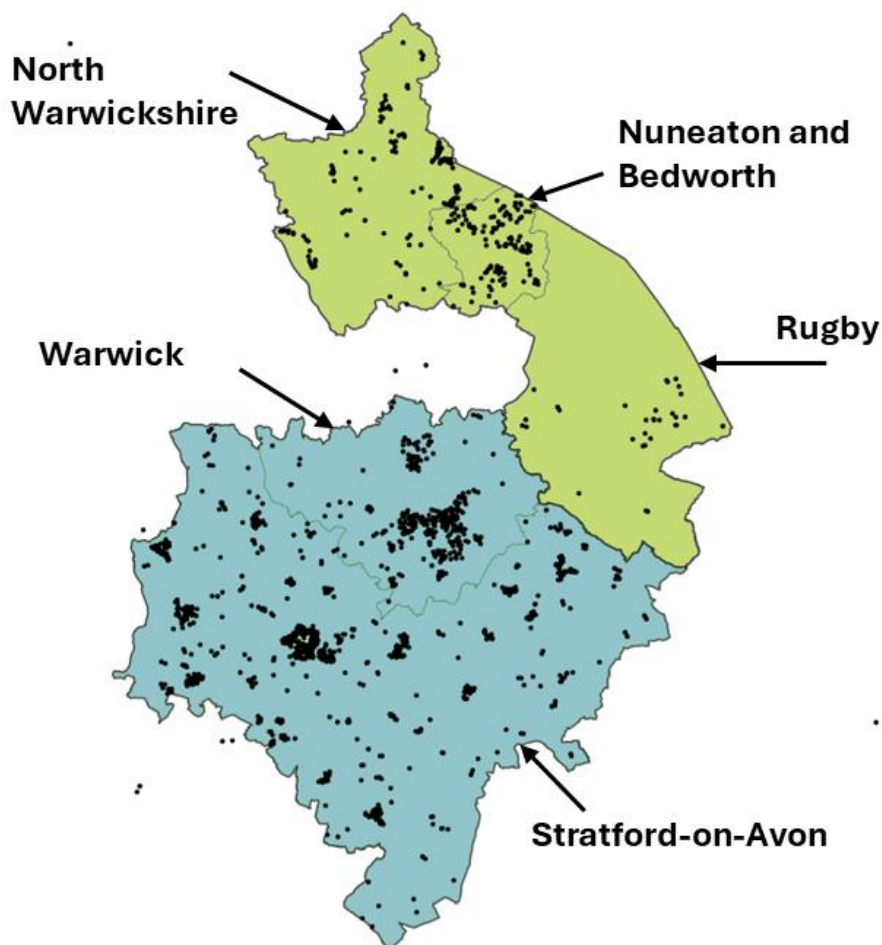
Table 5: Breakdown of individual responses to the open questionnaire by urban or rural and IMD quintile (calculated using Indices of Multiple Deprivation) for those providing postcodes in Warwickshire (NB: Percentages may not sum due to rounding)

Characteristic		All Responses		Population 18+
		Number of Responses	% of Valid Responses	
BY URBAN OR RURAL (IN WARKS)	Urban	945	50	69
	Rural	952	50	31
	Total valid responses	1,897	100	100
	<i>Outside Warks</i>	19	-	-
	<i>Not known</i>	396	-	-
IMD quintile (IN WARKS)	1 – most deprived	304	16	18
	2	386	20	21
	3	367	19	22
	4	391	21	20
	5 – least deprived	449	24	19
	Total valid responses	1,897	100	100
	<i>Outside Warks</i>	19	-	-
	<i>Not known</i>	396	-	-

^{3.14} Figure 1 below shows the number of responses that were received for the open engagement questionnaire (based on respondents who provided their postcode).

Figure 1: Map showing distribution of responses (for questionnaire responses where a postcode was provided)

The area shaded in green indicates the areas included in the councils' proposed North Warwickshire unitary area, while the areas shaded in blue are included in the proposed South Warwickshire unitary area.



- 3.15 An additional question provided a list of council services and asked respondents to indicate which of these they or their household had used in the previous twelve months. Table 6 below provides a summary of these responses.

Table 6: Summary of services used by individuals responding to the engagement questionnaire

	All Responses	
	Number of Responses	% of Valid Responses
Leisure and recreation (e.g. libraries, parks, open spaces, leisure centres)	1,560	83
Environmental (e.g. recycling centres, environmental protection, pest control)	1,560	83
Road, transport, and infrastructure (e.g. reporting repairs, public toilets, car parks)	1,053	56
Regulatory functions (e.g. trading standards, council tax and benefits enquiries, using the Registrar)	418	22
Planning and building (e.g. planning applications, building control/safety)	405	22
Education (e.g. school admissions/transport, special educational needs)	377	20
Social care and support (e.g. adult social care, children's social services, support for the vulnerable)	182	10
Public health (e.g. drug/alcohol dependency support, sexual health services, health programmes)	148	8
Housing (e.g. homelessness prevention, affordable/council housing, waiting lists, repairs, etc)	116	6
Total respondent count	1,871	100
<i>Not answered</i>	<i>441</i>	<i>-</i>

Interpretation of the data

- 3.16 The results for the open engagement questionnaire are presented in a largely graphical format. The pie charts and other graphics show the proportions (percentages) of respondents making responses. Where possible, the colours of the charts have been standardised with a 'traffic light' system in which:
- » green shades represent positive responses
 - » yellow shades represent neutral responses
 - » red shades represent negative responses
 - » bolder shades highlight responses at the 'extremes', for example, strongly agree or strongly disagree
- 3.17 Where percentages do not sum to 100, this may be due to computer rounding, the exclusion of "don't know" categories, or multiple answers. Throughout the report an asterisk (*) denotes any value less than half of one per cent. In some cases figures of 2% or below have been excluded from graphs to avoid potential identification of individual responses.
- 3.18 Individual percentages, such as those for 'strongly agree/disagree' or 'tend to agree/disagree', and grouped percentages showing overall levels of agreement and disagreement are presented here rounded to the nearest whole number. Because of this, the sum of the rounded individual percentages may not equal the percentage shown for overall agreement and disagreement.
- 3.19 The number of valid responses recorded for each question (base size) are reported throughout. As not all respondents answered every question, the valid responses vary between questions. Every response to every question has been taken into consideration.

Main Findings

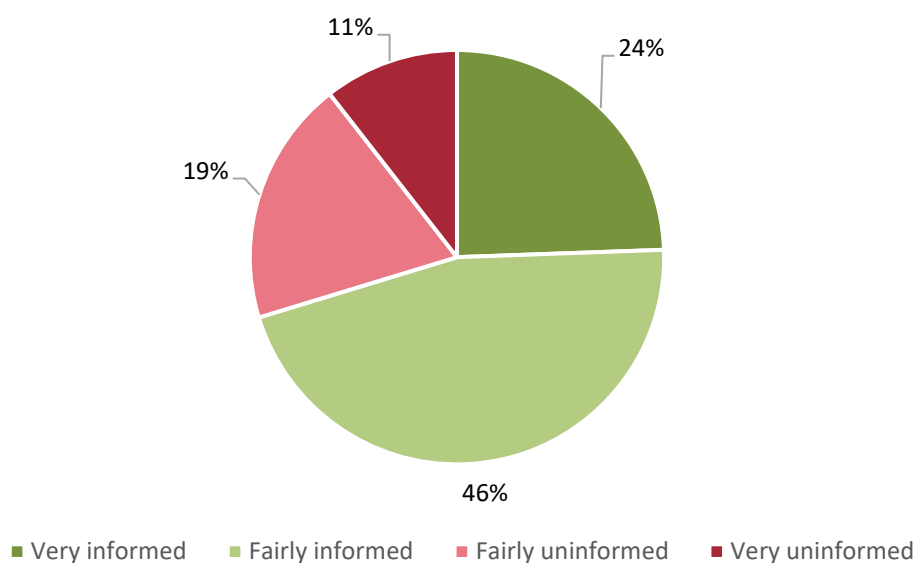
Awareness of current council services and views on making efficiencies

- 3.20 The questionnaire provided a brief explanation of the structure of local government that currently operates in Warwickshire, followed by an explanation of how UK government wishes to reduce the number of councils nationally by creating a smaller number of unitary councils, intended to make local government more streamlined and sustainable.
- 3.21 This preamble was followed by two questions: one aimed at understanding the extent to which respondents feel informed about the existing structure, and another aimed at understanding the extent to which they agree or disagree with the principle that councils should pursue opportunities to streamline and make efficiencies.

How informed or uninformed do you feel about which services are provided by your borough/district council and which are provided by the county council?

- 3.22 Overall, seven-in-ten individual questionnaire respondents (70%) indicated that they feel very or fairly informed about the services provided by councils in their area. The remaining three-in-ten (30%) indicated that they feel either fairly or very uninformed (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: How informed or uninformed do you feel about which services are provided by your borough/district council and which are provided by the county council?



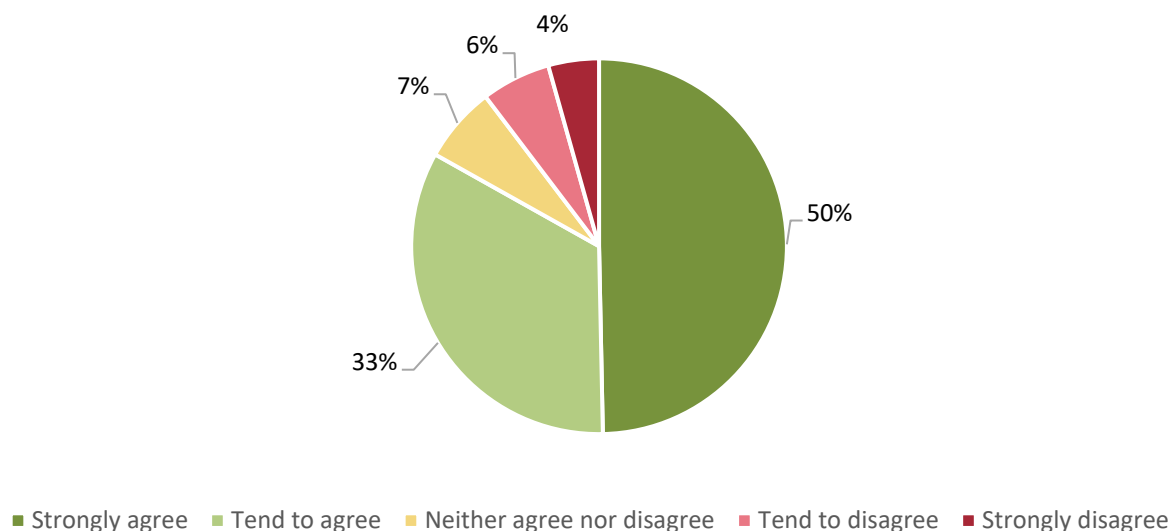
Base: All individual respondents (2,296)

Views on making efficiencies

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the councils should pursue opportunities to streamline services and make efficiencies, while maintaining good services?

- 3.23 Over four fifths (83%) of respondents agreed with the principle that the councils should pursue opportunities to streamline: half (50%) strongly agreed, with a further third (33%) tending to agree (see Figure 3).
- 3.24 Only a tenth (10%) of respondents disagreed (i.e. tended to disagree or strongly disagreed).

Figure 3: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the councils should pursue opportunities to streamline services and make efficiencies, while maintaining good services? OVERALL (individual respondents only)



Base: All individuals (2,293)

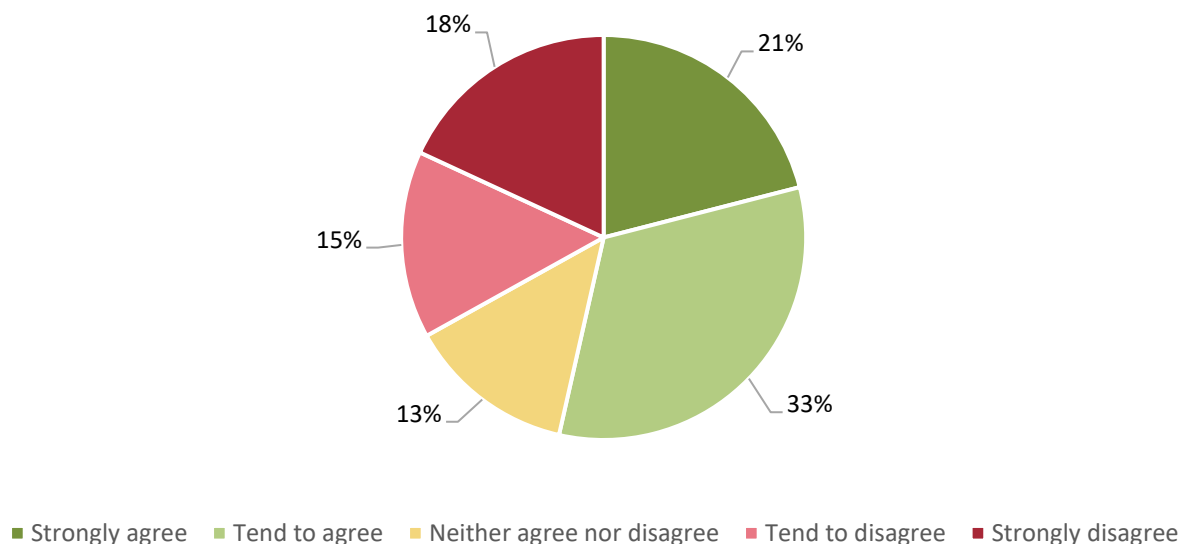
Views on reducing the number of councils

- 3.25 The questionnaire included a brief explanation of how the councils have collaborated on a plan to create a smaller number of new unitary councils. Respondents were then asked about the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the councils doing this, in line with the Government's requirements.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the government's requirement to replace the current two-tier system with a smaller number of unitary councils to run local government across the whole of Warwickshire?

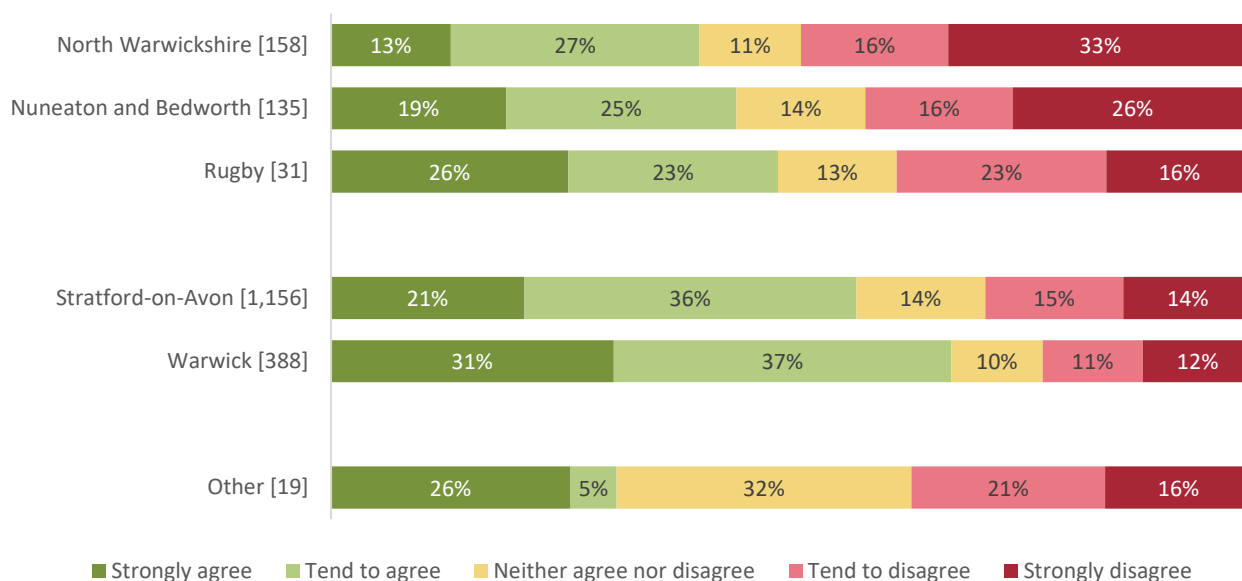
- 3.26 Just over half (54%) of respondents overall agreed, in principle, with the Government's requirement to replace the current system with a smaller number of unitary councils. A third of respondents (33%), however, disagreed (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the government's requirement to replace the current two-tier system with a smaller number of unitary councils to run local government across the whole of Warwickshire?



Base: All Individuals (2,271)

- 3.27 Figure 5 below summarises differences in views by respondents' district/borough (based on postcode where this was provided).
- 3.28 Around two thirds of respondents (68%) in Warwick agreed with the principle of introducing a smaller number of unitary councils, as did over half (57%) in Stratford-on-Avon. In the remaining districts, however, under half of respondents agreed: 48% in Rugby, 44% in Nuneaton and Bedworth, and 40% in North Warwickshire.
- 3.29 Levels of agreement were therefore somewhat higher in those districts forming the proposed South Warwickshire unitary, compared with those making up the proposed North Warwickshire unitary council.

Figure 5: Views on the principle of reducing the number of councils, by local authority

Base: Number of respondents shown in brackets

^{3.30} It is also worth noting the views of those who indicated that they were responding as a local authority employee. The numbers who responded were limited; nonetheless it is possible to observe a clear difference in views between those who indicated they are employed by the County Council (63% agreeing with the principle of reducing the number of councils) and those employed by the Districts or Borough Councils (35% agreeing).

Views on the criteria that should inform decision-making

^{3.31} The questionnaire outlined five different factors that the councils must consider when thinking about the future arrangements for local government in the area. To help the councils achieve the right balance between these different criteria, respondents were invited to give each a score out of 10, where “10” indicates that it is of critical importance and “0” indicates that it is of no importance. The five criteria, along with their definitions, are outlined below:

- » **Accountability:** democratic decision making that can be locally influenced and ensuring residents know how to raise issues to their local councillor and how to have a say on future service delivery
- » **Quality:** frontline services that are sustainable, cost-effective and equipped to deliver good local services in the long-term
- » **Local Identity:** boundaries that reflects how residents live their lives and how businesses operate
- » **Access:** keeping services as local as possible for as many residents as possible
- » **Value For Money:** cutting out duplication, increasing economies of scale and improving efficiencies

Please rate how important you think each of these criteria are using a whole number between 0 and 10, where “10” means that the criteria is critically important and “0” means the criteria is of no importance.

^{3.32} The average scores given to each of the criteria were calculated and are displayed in Figure 6 below.

^{3.33} As can be seen, all five criteria attracted a high average score; however, on average, a little more importance was attached to quality and accountability (both scoring 9.3), and a little less to local identity (scoring 8.3).

Figure 6: average scores attached to the five criteria that councils must consider when thinking about future arrangements for local government, based on a 0 to 10 scale where 10 indicates highest importance



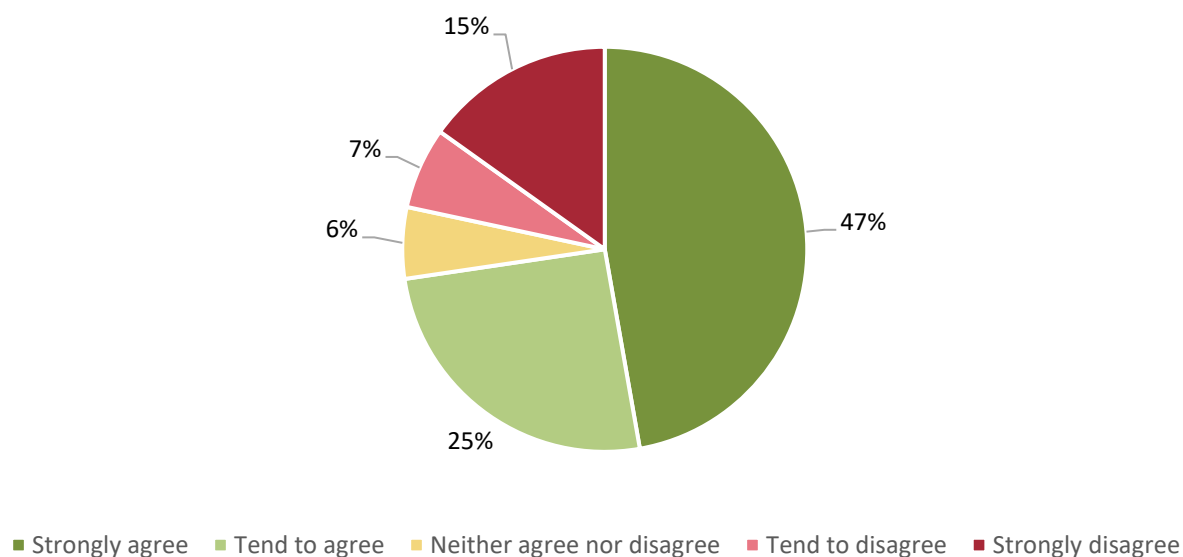
Views on the proposal for two unitary councils

- 3.34 It was explained that the councils considered options for either a single unitary covering the whole of Warwickshire, or for two unitary councils covering the north and south. It was explained that the two unitary option was preferred, with a brief outline of the main reasons for this.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal for two unitary councils to run local government across Warwickshire?

- 3.35 Over seven-in-ten respondents (73%⁸) agreed with the proposal for two unitary councils to run local government across Warwickshire. Moreover, nearly half (47%) indicated that they strongly agreed. Just over a fifth of respondents (22%) disagreed (see Figure 7).

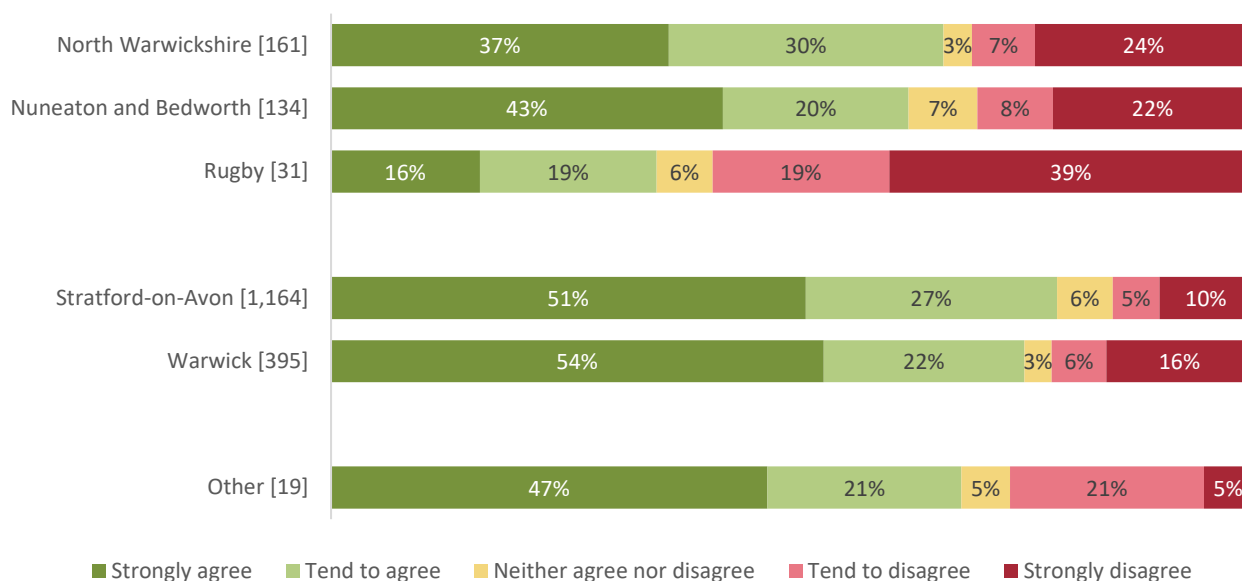
Figure 7: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal for two unitary councils to run local government across Warwickshire?



Base: All Individuals (2,088)

- 3.36 As shown in Figure 8 below, agreement was somewhat higher in those districts comprising the proposed South Warwickshire unitary council. More than three quarters of respondents in Stratford-on-Avon (79%) and Warwick (76%) agreed.
- 3.37 Agreement was lower in the areas comprising the proposed North Warwickshire unitary; nonetheless, it is worth noting that more than three-in-five respondents in North Warwickshire (66%) and Nuneaton and Bedworth (63%) agreed.
- 3.38 Among the small number of respondents in Rugby, however, the level of agreement was noticeably lower (35%).

⁸ Figures presented in commentary and on chart are rounded to nearest whole number for convenience. Actual results are 47.22% strongly agree, and 25.43% tend to agree, hence overall grouped agreement is 72.65%.

Figure 8: Views on the proposal for two unitary councils, by local authority

^{3.39} Again, it is worth briefly noting the views of those who indicated that they were responding as a local authority employee. There was a clear difference in views between those who indicated they are employed by a District or Borough council (of whom, 77% agreed) and those employed by the County (47% agreed).

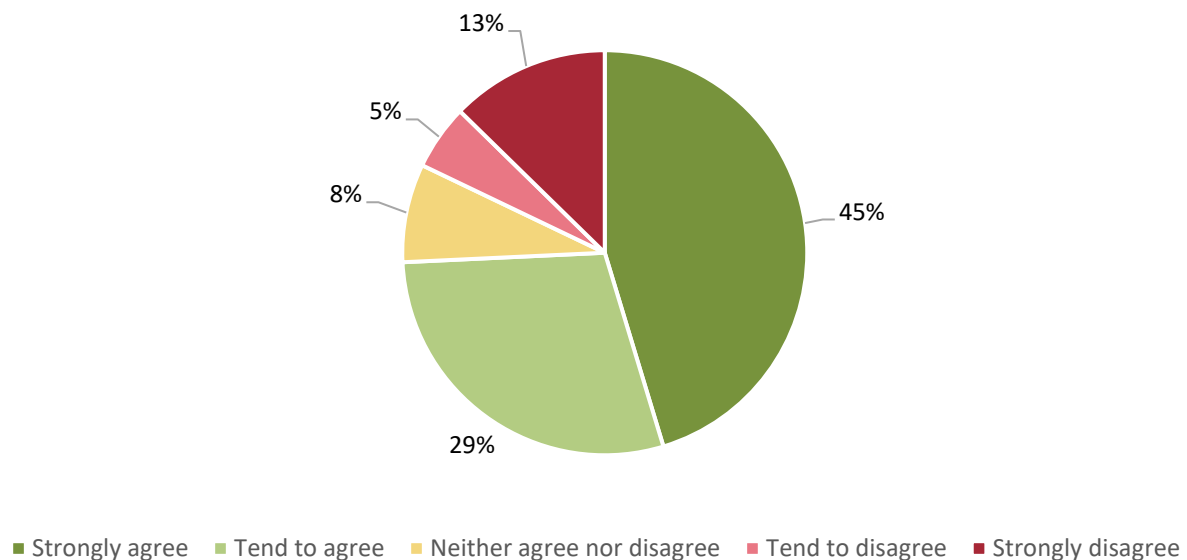
Views on the areas to be covered by each proposed new council

- 3.40 The questionnaire briefly outlined the areas to be covered by the proposed North and South Warwickshire unitary councils, before asking respondents about the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with this proposal.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the areas covered by the proposed two unitary councils?

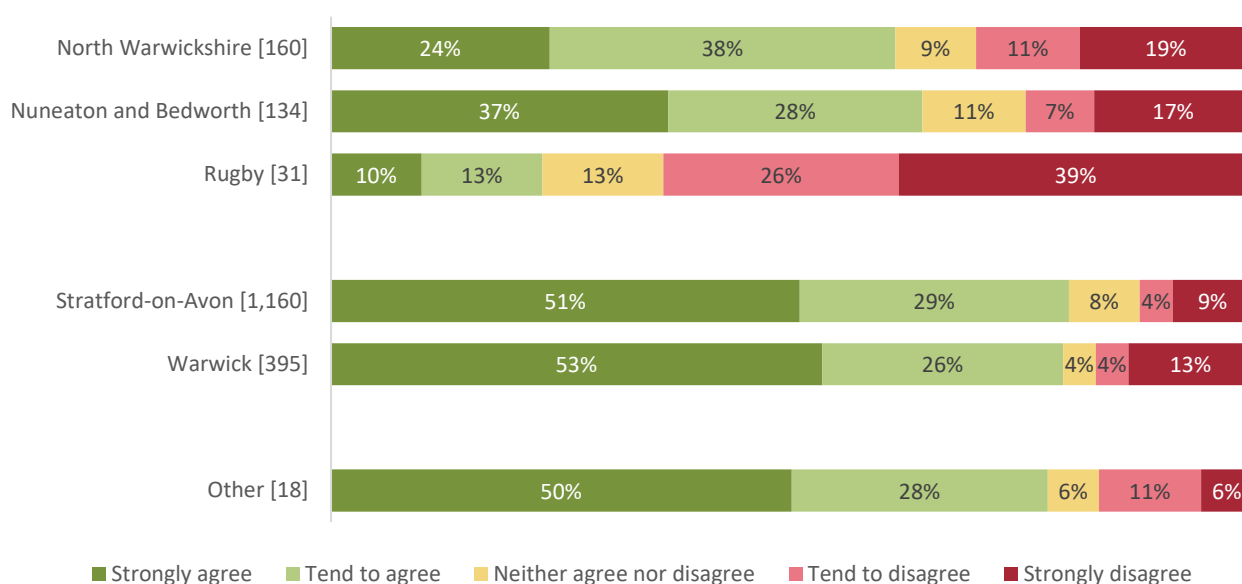
- 3.41 As shown in Figure 9, overall, around three quarters (74%) of questionnaire respondents agreed with the areas covered by the proposed unitary councils, with nearly half of all respondents (45%) strongly agreeing (see Figure 9).
- 3.42 However, just under a fifth (18%) of respondents disagreed with the areas to be covered by the proposed new councils.

Figure 9: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the areas covered by the proposed two unitary councils?



Base: All Individuals (2,078)

- 3.43 Once again, agreement appeared to be higher in the districts making up the proposed South Warwickshire unitary: around four-fifths of respondents in Stratford-on-Avon (80%) and Warwick (79%) agreed.
- 3.44 Among those areas that make up the proposed North Warwickshire unitary council: just over three-fifths of respondents in Nuneaton and Bedworth (64%) and North Warwickshire (61%) agreed with the proposed areas to be covered, while far fewer in Rugby (23%) agreed [although note that this is based on a very low number of responses].

Figure 10: Views on the areas to be covered by the proposed new councils, by local authority

Base: Number of respondents shown in brackets

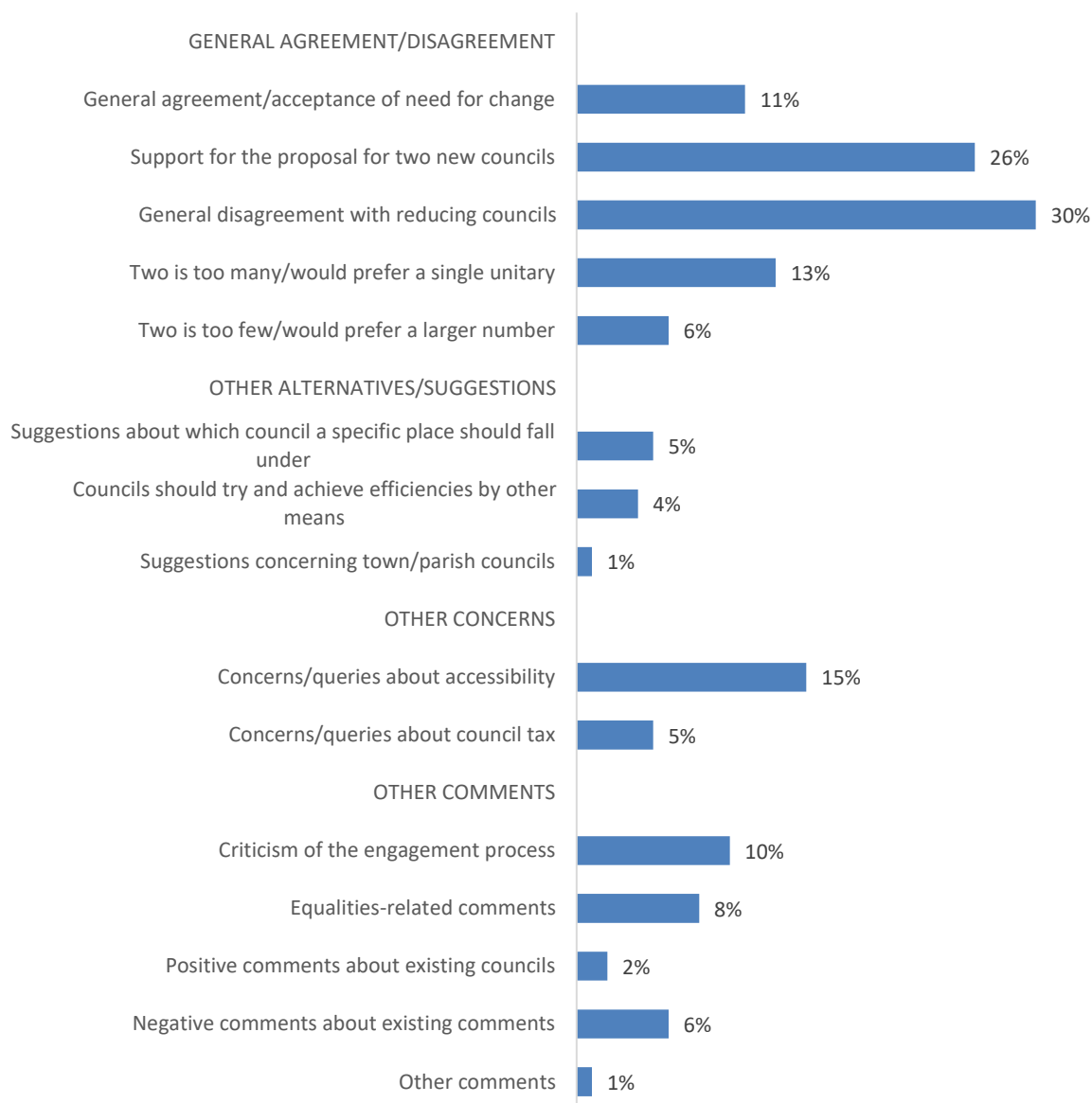
- 3.45 More than four-in-five of the District and Borough council employees agreed with the areas to be covered (83%), compared with just over half of those employed by the County (53%).

Respondents' comments

- 3.46 In addition to the structured questions, respondents were given the opportunity to share any additional views about the proposals and any alternative options that meet the government's criteria for local government reorganisation. They were also encouraged to share any potential positive or negative impacts of the proposals related to equalities or human rights that should be considered. In total, 848 individual respondents provided an additional comment.
- 3.47 All responses provided to the open-ended question have been read and then classified (coded) using a standardised approach (code frame). This approach helps ensure consistency when classifying different comments and the resulting codes represent themes that have been repeatedly mentioned in a quantifiable manner. The responses provided by a respondent to a single text question may present a number of different points or arguments, therefore in many cases the overall number of coded comments counted in a particular question may be higher than the number of people responding to that open-ended question (i.e. many respondents may have made comments about two or more different topics, so percentages will not sum to 100%).
- 3.48 Figure 11 overleaf highlights the key themes emerging from text comments, with a more detailed breakdown provided in the subsequent tables. The following themes were raised by at least a tenth of those who provided comments:
- » Disagreement/concern in general about a reduction in the number of councils (30%)
 - » Support for the proposal for two unitary councils – either agreement in general, or merely in the sense of this being preferable to a single unitary council (26%)
 - » Queries or concerns about accessibility in the event of there being fewer councils in future (15%)

- » Concern that two councils is too many or that a single unitary would be preferable (13%)
- » Agreement/acceptance in general around the need for change (11%).

Figure 11: Themes arising in text comments (individual respondents)



Base: All individuals who gave comments (848)

Agreement and disagreement with the proposals

- ^{3.49} Some respondents used the open-ended question to make comments generally expressing support for the principle of moving to unitary councils, citing (for example) opportunities to achieve efficiencies and value for money.

“A timely opportunity for change and create better value-added decision making.”

“If this leads to streamlining services, greater efficiency and removal of duplicated roles then this would be a good thing.”

"Every time I contact the council I get told 'that's not town. That's district, or county'. So I am thrilled that from now on there will be only one point of contact for my area."

- 3.50 Other respondents, on the other hand, opposed the principle of introducing a smaller number of unitary councils which, it was suggested, would be more remote and less understanding of their local areas. Some expressed a few that "bigger is not necessarily better" or that the councils "should not fix what isn't broken", while others commented positively about their experience of dealing with their local district or borough council. There were concerns that councillors would be less accessible, leading to a reduction in accountability.

"Why change what works well? Local authorities are better for the communities they serve, they understand their areas and residents, if they are to become part of a larger entity, the personal touch will be lost."

"Warwickshire's 'two-tier' system has worked well for numerous years, so why change a system that is working? Bigger institutions are often no better and not necessarily simpler or more efficient. Communication is often lost or non-existent between departments. Smaller organisations can be far more efficient and economic. The existing 'two-tier' council could be streamlined for more efficiency..."

"The district council at Stratford seems largely efficient and successful in dealing with local matters. My preference is for this to continue."

- 3.51 Those who expressed support for the proposal for two unitary councils often did so on the basis that a single unitary might be too remote or inaccessible, lack accountability, and not treat all areas equitably. While many respondents were wary of any change, some felt that having two unitary councils (i.e. as opposed to one) might mitigate some of their concerns or end up being 'the lesser of two evils'.

"A single authority for Warwickshire, whilst appearing an obvious choice, would weaken local accountability."

"Would prefer no change to current structure. However, if change has to happen then a north/south split is better than one authority covering all of Warwickshire."

"Strongly against the option for only one unitary authority. This would be too far removed from residents, too unwieldy, and not able to respond to the vastly differing needs of residents in the north and south of the county."

- 3.52 It was also suggested that having two councils would better reflect demographic and economic differences between the north and south of the county.

"I agree that north v south is a good split. People who live in Warwick making decisions for Nuneaton and Bedworth, with very different demographics and needs, makes little sense."

"The two areas proposed are significantly different in terms of culture with the north being more developed and industrial; the south is far more rural and tourist centre (edge of Cotswolds); the requirements of each area are fundamentally different."

“Warwickshire itself is a poorly constructed 'county', lacking the centre of gravity that would be provided by a dominant city: e.g. Coventry. There is little synergy between the mainly rural southern and more industrial northern districts. Therefore, the proposed 2-unitary solution will better match the needs and likely future development of the two regions.”

- 3.53 Specifically, a few commented on political differences between the north and south, which they felt had become more apparent based on the results of the May 2025 council elections.

“The proposed split is good because the voting demographics across the two proposed areas are clear in the County Council election, so by splitting them there would be two separate councils which could pursue policies which more of their residents approve of.”

“The makeup of the cabinet and portfolio holders in the current County Council show strongly why South Warwickshire needs its own unitary authority. The south of the county is unrepresented at County level in senior positions.”

- 3.54 On the other hand, several respondents indicated that two new councils might be too many. They suggested that – if the purpose of local government reform is to simplify and streamline services – then having a single unitary council would be the most rational and sustainable solution. It was also occasionally suggested that two councils might lack influence or struggle to attract investment, or that they may fail the Government’s criteria around population size.

- 3.55 A single unitary council, on the other hand, was said by these respondents to be more viable, likely to achieve better economies of scale and to be more able to support strategic decision-making across a wide area (e.g. in areas such as climate/sustainability, public transport and infrastructure).

“This will be a colossal and painful transition so if it is to be done it should be for maximum benefit which would be a single council. The savings of moving to two councils are not worth the effort and would squander an opportunity to do this properly.”

“Why pay double the number of salaries for duplicate services provided by two unitary authorities?”

“Strange that you are not even proposing the single unitary model, which would clearly be the most appropriate and effective model for Warwickshire and would maintain vital services across a county-wide footprint rather than artificially creating a split system, creating risk and extra cost for no reason.”

“Proposing North and South Warwickshire councils is self-indulgent, lacks strategic thinking and [they] will be insignificant [compared] to... larger neighbouring authorities. I also don't believe you'll meet the criteria for unitary authorities or attract funding leading to underinvestment in an area that desperately needs government attention. Working on a Warwickshire-wide basis has built-in structural advantages in terms of essential services, partner relationships and regional influence.”

- 3.56 Another concern expressed by proponents of a single unitary council was in terms of the impact on county-wide council services such as education and social care, which would need to be disaggregated in the event of a two-unitary proposal moving forward. In contrast, it was also suggested that a single unitary might generally be better placed to promote a joined-up approach in areas such as social care, housing and planning.

“It is illogical to move to two unitary councils... it would be madness to split services like adult social care, children's social care, education, send, public transport etc - losing all economies of scale and creating twice as much management.”

“How are services which are common to both proposed new unitary authorities going to be managed i.e. library services, social care, roads/highways, streetlights? Currently these are managed by WCC, are they going to be split into two and processes duplicated for each new authority?”

“Two authorities gives very little consideration to the massive budget issues such as adult social care and education, along with legislation requiring in-area placements for children under sufficiency duty (as an example). How will any social care services be commissioned? Double the staff? How are they to work with health partners? How will joint working arrangements such as s106 and s117 be managed by two? Streamlining into one would save on staffing particularly at higher level with directors and chief execs. Merging into one would allow for joined up processes across social care and housing which can be incredibly difficult now.”

- 3.57 Reflecting on differences between areas, there were some concerns that the two-unitary proposal would divide the county on socioeconomic lines, with a risk that this might exacerbate existing inequalities and create, in the words of one respondent, “a ‘poor council’ and a more ‘affluent council’.”

“The proposed split is clearly based on economic grounds with the bulk of the services needed in the new north and the bulk of the funding coming from the south. The new split will reduce funding for the area which needs it the most and increase it for the area which needs it less.”

“I believe one unitary authority would be better to ensure that areas of deprivation are targeted and money is shared equally.”

“A North Warks council will have less revenue from council tax and business rates, with greater levels of need, impacting on service quality and exacerbating social and economic inequality.”

- 3.58 On the other hand, not all agreed with this point of view, as it was also suggested that dividing the county on north-south lines could have a positive impact e.g. in terms of safeguarding the interests of the north of the county:

“Warwickshire County Council (WCC) has been out of touch with the needs of the north of the county for years. In addition, WCC has provided poorer services in the north of the county compared with the south of the county- the money has gone south. in my view this will continue if Warwickshire becomes a single unitary authority.”

“It has to be a two unitary council system not a one unitary council, as Leamington Spa and Stratford would get all the resources.”

“As a resident in the Nuneaton and Bedworth area in north Warwickshire, I know we have been let down by the conservative county council... the north of the county in my eyes, would be better off on its own, along with Rugby.”

- 3.59 A few respondents were concerned that the areas making up the proposed southern unitary also have diverse needs and characteristics (e.g. urban and rural differences), which would not easily be reconciled under a single council. It was also stated that previous efforts to combine the councils had not come to fruition, or that the new council was likely to inherit significant debts from Warwick District Council.

"I do not think that a single council for south Warwickshire is a reasonable solution. The council will be too big, of necessity it will focus on the major population centres (Warwick, Leamington and Stratford) and ignore the needs of the rural areas."

"Stratford-on-Avon and Warwick district councils were looking to merge two years ago but they didn't because of the level of Warwick District Council's debt against the healthy financial position of Stratford District Council...Therefore, I feel that a south Warwickshire unitary authority would be ridden with debts which would seriously burden the new south unitary authority..."

Other comments on the areas to be covered, and possible alternatives

- 3.60 In terms of Rugby, some respondents felt that it might fit better within the proposed southern Warwickshire unitary, rather than the northern one.

"Not sure about Rugby being part of "North Warwickshire" as connection [with] Nuneaton and Bedworth and North Warwickshire seems weak."

"Residents of much of Rugby Borough identify with the south of the county rather than the north."

- 3.61 There were also a small number of suggestions that the boundary between the proposed north and south unitary councils should be reconsidered, with the existing Rugby borough being broken up and specific localities redistributed between the two new unitary council areas.

"North-south divide should be moved further north based on the route of A45 with residents of Ryton, Stretton, Thurlaston, Dunchurch etc having a vote on whether to be in north or south."

"Depending on what Rugby Council decide, one possible amendment could be to split existing Rugby Borough so that the parishes to the north and west of Rugby [form] part of North Warwickshire and the south of Rugby [go] into South Warwickshire. Having worked at the council I think the southern parishes are more closely aligned to Warwick than the northern ones."

- 3.62 There were also occasional suggestions for a slightly larger number of unitary councils, such as three.

"I think there's more merit in reducing it to three councils: North, Mid and South-West, with Kenilworth, Leamington, Warwick and Southam in the middle; Nuneaton and Rugby to the north; and Stratford and villages to the south and west. Each would then be able to focus more on their specific environment."

"Three areas aligned on urban density... 1. North Warwickshire, Nuneaton & Bedworth 2. Stratford and Rugby - featuring many smaller rural communities 3. Warwick Leamington & Kenilworth."

- 3.63 Others suggested cross-boundary alternatives involving areas outside of Warwickshire e.g. Coventry and parts of Oxfordshire, Leicestershire, Staffordshire and Worcestershire.

"I do not believe the size of the population for the proposed north & south councils makes them viable - you would be better merging north with Coventry due to the geographical aspect and then south with Oxfordshire."

"A more innovative approach would be to look across current county boundaries and for north Warks to look to Leicestershire. There is already a strong track record of North Warwickshire and Nuneaton and Bedworth working closely with Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council and there is much common sense of place and use of services."

"My belief is that North Warwickshire would be better served with a unitary which encompasses Lichfield and Tamworth in Staffordshire, and Nuneaton and Bedworth. These boroughs have a greater affinity with each other..."

"Transfer south-west Warwickshire to Worcestershire."

Other concerns, queries and suggestions

- 3.64 Occasionally, respondents made suggestions about sharing services. Some were referring to the existing councils (i.e. suggesting the districts and boroughs might share some functions to achieve savings while maintaining the current configuration).
- 3.65 However, others suggested that the proposed two, new unitary councils might also share services. It was also suggested that current countywide functions (e.g. social care) could be commissioned over a larger area in future and used by several councils. In a couple of cases, respondents who lived on the periphery of Warwickshire noted that they might benefit from being able to use services in a neighbouring authority if agreements were put in place.

"I would agree with the two unitary councils, however budgetary considerations would need to be taken into account and shared services considered especially in terms of HR, finance and IT systems being shared so cost is not incurred for different disparate systems for both councils."

"There should be some sharing of the services it will be harder to disaggregate, such as SEND."

"It has always been my view that South Warwickshire is best served by a council that strikes the right balance of local and accessible vs size. Two unitaries achieves that aim. However, that doesn't mean each council should do everything on its own, there is scope for sharing the load across multiple councils. Adult social care and SEND provision can be run by one system used by multiple councils across the Midlands, Oxfordshire and Northamptonshire."

"Encourage collaboration with neighbouring authorities and shared working arrangements to minimise the impact and improve service access for those that live on borders."

- 3.66 Some respondents commented on a town and country divide in the county, suggesting that many rural communities already struggle with access to services and/or feel more remote from local government decision-makers, particularly when they lie close to the Warwickshire boundary. There was some concern that this could be exacerbated if there are fewer councils in future.

“With North Warwickshire being rural, taking away the smaller brough council and replacing it with a lot larger one, probably somewhere miles away, will mean residents have little or no say or contact with their local services.”

“I'd like to see a greater focus on, and help for, rural communities who currently feel under siege from developers and simultaneously ignored from a provision of services standpoint.”

- 3.67 Several comments were made relating to town and parish councils, or potentially new bodies such as “area committees”. Some queried why there had not been more discussion of town and parish councils in the engagement document and were often in favour of giving them an enhanced role to maintain local accountability and decision-making, particularly in areas such as planning. There was also some support for creating new town councils and neighbourhood forums. However, a few did express concern that any additional demands placed on town and parish councils might prove to be too onerous.

“Parish and town councils may feel disempowered if decision-making becomes more centralised - their role should be strengthened in regard to shaping local priorities.”

“There should also be encouragement to form slim town councils, to ensure that local decisions, such as planning are properly considered by people who are the most informed and each town retains its own identity.”

“I worry that unitary councils will attempt to ‘palm off’ certain services and accountability to parish councils who simply cannot facilitate these services and community engagement with no paid staff.”

- 3.68 The following concerns and considerations were also noted by some respondents:

- » Concerns around access to services in general, and a potential reduction in council sites and offices specifically, noting that:
 - access is already challenging for some residents (e.g. those in more rural areas, those relying on public transport, some older people) and reducing it further may disproportionately affect those with low incomes and other vulnerabilities
 - not all residents have good digital access or skills and therefore some might struggle if they were unable to attend a council site in person (e.g. some elderly people)
 - maintaining face-to-face contact with service users might be particularly important in some service areas (e.g. housing intervention) or where service users are more vulnerable, lack literacy etc
 - maintaining offices in some towns and strengthening public transport provision might help to mitigate some of these impacts.
- » Concerns about impacts on partnership working if moving to two unitary councils (particularly if these other bodies continue to be organised on a pan-Warwickshire basis e.g. Warwickshire Police and the Fire and Rescue Service).
- » Potential job losses and redundancies due to reorganisation, and other possible workforce issues.
- » Concerns about the potential disruption and costs associated with transition, the impacts on service provision and the timescales involved.

- » Concerns about council tax and the equalisation process, specifically:
 - the prospect of increases at a time when council tax is already perceived to be high and many households are struggling with the costs of living,
 - concerns that the process might be unfair to some areas (e.g. concerns that rural areas will continue to have poorer access to services, while also being required to contribute more to subsidise the better provision in larger towns).
- » Concerns about potential impacts on council housing tenants if areas are amalgamated e.g. rent increases, changes to repair service, longer housing waiting lists etc.
- » Criticism of the engagement process, typically
 - concern that the proposals are a ‘fait accompli’ and residents’ views may have little impact
 - claims that the materials are biased, including complaints that the questionnaire provides less opportunity to express support for a single unitary council or the status quo, than it does for the preferred two-council option
 - concerns about a lack of information provided, with some suggestion that further details (e.g. on cost savings, service area budgets, senior leadership teams, etc) would have helped to better inform respondents’ views on the proposals.
- » Concerns that those living near the boundary between the proposed new unitary councils may lose access to some local services or facilities, where these are currently provided by the County Council (e.g. residents in the south of Rugby borough who use the recycling centre in Southam, Stratford-on-Avon district).
- » Disappointment at the potential loss of “Warwickshire” as a local government entity, which “would be a shame”.
- » Consideration should be given as to the best way to promote the new areas’ identities e.g. coats of arms, insignia.

^{3.69} A limited number of comments raised additional equalities concerns, primarily around the risks of a deterioration in services provided to vulnerable people, if services such as social care, safeguarding services, special educational needs provision, and so on, were to be disrupted. It was also suggested that vulnerable people might be left confused by the possible changes in provision.

“Careful consideration will need to be given to how children's services, safeguarding services and early help/intervention (including youth crime prevention) services are still delivered to ensure outreach and awareness isn't reduced given the expanded geographic footprint. It's also important the new councils still have the resources to develop localised approaches - needs and priorities in Leamington will be different to those in Stratford.”

“I just think the change needs to be managed carefully so that vulnerable people aren't left confused by any changes in service providers, and particularly that vulnerable children don't slip through the net during the change.”

^{3.70} Concern was also expressed that insufficient research has been undertaken, or that little evidence has been presented, to understand the likelihood of possible impacts of the proposal on health and social care

provision in the county, and therefore on some of its most vulnerable residents, including those with disabilities.

“Careful consideration will need to be given to how children's services, safeguarding services and early help/intervention (including youth crime prevention) services are still delivered to ensure outreach and awareness isn't reduced given the expanded geographic footprint. It's also important the new councils still have the resources to develop localised approaches - needs and priorities in Leamington will be different to those in Stratford.”

“I have a significant concern over the provision of essential services as there is no evidence presented that services will not be degraded, especially for the most needy and vulnerable.”

- 3.71 One comment made by a school governor expressed concerns that schools may be disadvantaged if there are disruptions or changes to any of the various support services currently provided at county level / by the County Council.

“Each council will need complex systems and high-level staff to support things like cloud services, software support, accounting systems, advisory services, welfare services such as attendance advisors, safeguarding including the provision of software and advisory solutions. There are also things like governor services offering reading and support and things like HR, MIS, bursarial support and many other areas that are currently provided at county level and the economies of scale that can bring. Would splitting all these services diminish the levels of support and indeed possibly increase costs to schools?”

- 3.72 Finally, it is worth noting comments from a small number of respondents who queried how the proposed new unitary councils might fit into wider devolution arrangements for England. A couple of these respondents commented on an apparent lack of reference to strategic authorities covering all or parts of Warwickshire in the engagement materials.
- 3.73 A couple of respondents felt that having two councils might be preferable if it helped advance the case for creating a strategic authority based on the county of Warwickshire; on the other hand, a few instead advocated building closer links with neighbouring areas such as the West Midlands or Oxfordshire.

“There's no mention of a strategic authority in this consultation, isn't this key to determining the success of the South and North Warks proposal?”

“There has been no information about what strategic authority South Warwickshire would fall within - this is important for spatial planning and devolution. Would South Warwickshire simply fall into a Warwickshire strategic authority? Would it be mayoral? This is not clear.”

“I agree that two authorities is much better... but serious consideration of coming under the West Midlands Combined Authority at the next opportunity should be considered.”

“Regarding a potential strategic area with elected mayor, south Warwickshire and north Oxfordshire would probably be a more natural 'fit'.”

“The West Midlands should be split; Coventry and Solihull should join with Warwickshire to become a strategic authority. The geography works; industries and businesses would work; transport links make sense; education would be better, including further education and universities. If the West Midlands can’t be split up, we should seek a strategic partnership with Worcester or Chilterns.”

Engagement Questionnaire: Organisation Responses

Overview

- 3.74 Of the 2,334 open questionnaire responses, 22 indicated that they had been submitted on behalf of an organisation. Each organisational response typically represents the views of many individuals, and feedback from these organisations has therefore been reported separately in this report.
- 3.75 Responding organisations were informed that their views may be published in full, and were asked for details about their organisation, including what it represents; the specific group or department; the area it covers; and how the views of members were gathered. Not all organisations supplied this information, but their names have been included in the report where provided.
- 3.76 Additionally, two Members of Parliament responded via the questionnaire. Give that these are individuals responding in their official capacity, and representing the interests of their wider constituents, they are included in this section alongside the organisational responses.
- 3.77 Table 7 below provides a full list of the organisations responding to the engagement (who provided a name).

Table 7: List of organisations responding to the questionnaire

Abbey Theatre
Action21
Barford, Sherbourne and Wasperton Joint Parish Council
Citizens Advice Bureau, North Warwickshire
Hatton Parish Council
HR-ZN Group Ltd
Kingsbury “Good Neighbour” volunteer group
NHS Coventry and Warwickshire
Ramblers, Warwickshire area
Rockinghams (Motor)Cycle Shop, Southam
Royal Leamington Spa Town Council
Shrewley Parish Council
Stretton-on-Fosse Parish Council
Tredington Parish Council
Unnamed business in Stratford-on-Avon
Warwick Chamber of Trade
Whitchurch Parish Meeting
Wormleighton Parish Meeting
Plus two Members of Parliament: Manuela Perteghella (MP for Stratford-on-Avon) and Matt Western (MP for Warwick and Leamington)

- 3.78 Given the relatively low number of organisations that responded to the questionnaire, the appropriateness of percentages in quantifying views is limited. Therefore, the percentages presented here are intended to be indicative only: they have been displayed at an overall level only to provide a contrast between views from organisations and individuals.

Main findings

- 3.79 Of the 22 organisational responses⁹:
- » 16 agreed with the principle that the councils should pursue opportunities to streamline services and make efficiencies, while maintaining good services; only 1 disagreed and 2 indicated that they 'neither' agreed nor disagreed;
 - » 10 agreed with the government's requirement to replace the current two-tier system with a smaller number of unitary councils, although there were also 7 that disagreed and 3 who answered 'neither';
 - » 14 agreed with the proposal for two unitary councils to run local government across Warwickshire - which was more than double the number that disagreed (i.e. 6), while 1 answered 'neither';
 - » 13 agreed with the areas to be covered by the new councils, while only 2 disagreed; however, there were 6 who indicated that they 'neither' agreed nor disagreed.

Additional comments made by organisations

- 3.80 Some of the comments made by organisations raised similar themes to those in comments expressed by individuals.
- 3.81 For example, there was some acknowledgement that the north and south are different in character, and there might therefore be benefits in having two unitary councils to represent their respective interests.

"Shrewley Parish Council are in agreement with the proposal structure put forward by Warwick District Council as there is a practical distinction between north and south being rural and not as rural." **Shrewley Parish Council**

"North and South Warwickshire are very different in needs and priorities. South Warks is mainly... semi-rural or rural, and rural areas could be neglected as they have different priorities."

Wormleighton Parish Meeting

- 3.82 Both Members of Parliament who submitted questionnaire responses (both representing constituencies in the proposed South Warwickshire unitary council area) also supported the proposals:

⁹ Please note that not all organisations answered every question; therefore the numbers agreeing, disagreeing or answering 'neither' will not necessarily sum to 22.

“Given that the County is bisected by Coventry, which represents its own council area, there is already a geographical split between north and south, which lends itself to such a division. Equally, a two-unitary approach guarantees greater local democratic representation - were a single unitary model to be adopted, this would be a concern. Regarding the areas covered by the two proposed unitary councils, I agree in principle, however it's important that Rugby Borough is allowed the discretion to choose whether to be part of North or South Warwickshire.” **Matt Western, MP for Warwick and Leamington**

“[The proposed South Warwickshire unitary council], which is contained within the boundaries of the south Warwickshire NHS trust, and of the emerging South Warwickshire Local Plan, would ensure local government remains anchored in the communities it serves, providing more responsive decision-making than a large, remote unitary ever could, and offering an efficient structure for healthcare and social care. Further, Stratford and Warwick district councils work already closely together with several shared services....” **Manuela Perteghella, MP for Stratford-on-Avon**

- 3.83 However, there was some preference for a single unitary council, expressed by one local company which identified the main benefits of a single unitary as being: cost efficiencies and the optimisation of resources; unified strategic planning; a stronger regional voice; equity and consistency of services; and ability to pursue enhanced digital services and make better use of data.
- 3.84 Similarly, the response purporting to be on behalf of the local NHS felt that a single unitary suggested that a single unitary would achieve better economies of scale and better match the footprint across which health services are commissioned.

“Dividing Warwickshire into two councils risks duplicating bureaucracy, weakening strategic coherence, and reducing efficiency — all while missing the opportunity to create a stronger, unified voice that can deliver better services and unlock investment at scale.” **HR-ZN Group Ltd**

“One unitary authority would make more sense from a health perspective. Matches the population we commission to, has the scale to reduce cost and deliver services and play an active part in economic development.” **NHS Coventry and Warwickshire**

- 3.85 One of the parish councils also expressed scepticism about the proposed benefits of having two unitary authorities; but ultimately it was felt that more information would need to be provided for it to be able to express a clear preference in either direction.

“We tend to feel that splitting to two authorities of approx. 300,000 people undermines the objectives of the unitary project and fails to give sufficient population numbers to support the collective bargaining and population diversity which would give these benefits. The current proposals lack depth and detail sufficient to endorse or otherwise this position, and for us as a parish council, we feel uninformed to make decisions in either direction.” **Barford, Sherbourne and Wasperton Joint Parish Council**

- 3.86 There was some concern about a possible weakening of the links between town and parish councils and the other tiers of local government. One parish council highlighted its good working relationships with existing

councillors at both District and County level and queried whether these could be replicated under a unitary council, given it is anticipated that there would be fewer councillors overall.

- 3.87 Similarly, a local charity highlighted positive working relationships with current district councillors.

“We currently have either a district or county councillor, or both, attend our meetings which we see as a valuable contribution. We are unclear how many unitary councillors would be elected but believe they may be as little as one third of the current district/county councillors. This is likely to mean that any councillor would have within their area a significant number of PCs and the regular participation link would be impossible. We see this as a great concern which could be addressed either by each unitary councillor having one or more deputies or (preferred) council employees having an area link which would make them more aligned with local issues and the PC better briefed on county issues.” **Stretton-on-Fosse Parish Council**

“As a local charity we work with all three levels of council (including the Town Council) and the district councillors have a greater understanding of and engagement with the local issues.” **Action 21**

- 3.88 There was also a query about the possibility of future increases to town and parish council precepts, in the event that they are required to take on any additional responsibilities from the district and borough councils.
- 3.89 There was some support for new bodies such as area committees, to help maintain local accountability and provide some balance between localism and the more centralised approach suggested by unitarisation.

“We would propose a single Warwickshire unitary authority with: sub-local delivery areas (e.g. regional hubs or service areas) to retain local identity; area-based committees or boards for community-level engagement and democratic oversight; central strategic leadership to guide growth, sustainability, and economic recovery. This model delivers both economies of scale and localism, avoiding the binary choice between centralisation and fragmentation.” **HR-ZN Group Ltd**

“We need accountability by way of area committees with the councillors on them.” **Whitchurch Parish Meeting**

- 3.90 One comment was made in support of the proposed two new unitary councils together forming a strategic authority, possibly in conjunction with at least one other neighbouring unitary authority.

“The two Warwickshire Unitary Authorities should form a Strategic Authority, possibly incorporating a neighbouring UA in e.g. Leicestershire”. **Hatton Parish Council**

4. Focus Groups with General Residents

Overview

- 4.1 Four deliberative focus groups were held with a broad cross-section of randomly selected Warwickshire residents: one in each Warwickshire district/borough except Rugby Borough Council. ORS worked in collaboration with the councils to prepare informative/stimulus material for the groups, before facilitating the discussions and preparing this independent report of findings.
- 4.2 The focus groups were designed to inform and engage participants with the issues under discussion. This was undertaken using a 'deliberative' approach to encourage people to question and reflect on the issues in detail. The meetings were attended as below in Table 3.

Table3: Focus groups (area, time, date and number of attendees)

Focus group location	Time/date	Number of attendees
Stratford-on-Avon	Tuesday 2 nd September 2025, 6:30pm – 8:15pm	7
Warwick	Wednesday 3 rd September 2025, 6:30pm – 8:15pm	10
Nuneaton and Bedworth	Tuesday 9 th September 2025, 6:30pm – 8:15pm	8
North Warwickshire	Wednesday 11 th September 2025, 6:30pm – 8:15pm	10
Total		35

- 4.3 The focus groups were independently facilitated by ORS. Each meeting began with the ORS presentation (to ensure that standardised information was provided to each of the sessions) which outlined the current council configuration across Warwickshire; the devolution and local government reorganisation agenda underpinning the reasons for change; the options for change, and importance of particular factors; and the rationale for and potential impacts of the North/South model. The meetings were thorough and truly deliberative in listening to, and responding openly to, a wide range of evidence and issues.

Main findings from residents' focus groups

Most people felt attached to their local areas, but less so to Warwickshire as a whole

- 4.4 Participants were initially asked to reflect on how they felt about their area and how attached they were to both their specific district or borough, and to Warwickshire in general.
- 4.5 Most participants spoke of being attached to their area, both those who had lived there for all or most of their lives, and those who were relatively new residents. In terms of what helps form those attachments, historical bonds; having family and friends nearby; good community spirit; community events; and clean, safe, green neighbourhoods were most prevalent.

"It's a great environment to bring your children up in. I think, generally speaking, it's a safe area. Absolutely." – Warwick Resident

"It is such a nice place to live. I feel really privileged to live somewhere so nice." – Warwick Resident

- 4.6 Others added that they feel attached to their borough or district area because of it is rural or semi-rural surrounding. Having good connections from these less urban areas to cities like Manchester, Birmingham and London were also seen to be a benefit of living there.

"I love living in the village and I really take pleasure every day in arriving home and seeing the countryside." – North Warwickshire Resident

"The positive thing is the connections to Manchester, to London, to Birmingham. It's so easy to get to all of these places." – Nuneaton and Bedworth Resident

- 4.7 Those who felt less attached to their local area tended to feel this way because they had not been living in the area long enough to develop an emotional connection. However, these participants still expressed their fondness of their local areas, regardless of their lack of emotional attachment. Those who did feel attachment to Warwickshire as a whole, praised it as a 'leafy', 'green', and 'pleasant' place to live.

"I wouldn't say I'm particularly attached to Stratford as such as I grew up outside Stratford. But as others have said, it's very lovely place to be around. I think it's quite expensive [but] the green scenery and the sort of small villages, - it's a really lovely place." – Stratford-on-Avon

"I think if you compare it with other counties, Warwickshire probably is quite well regarded and sort of seen as quite a nice, you know, affluent and green, pleasant area in the country." – Stratford-on-Avon Resident

- 4.8 Finally, some residents raised concerns around social and economic degradation across their areas. Some felt less connection to their local areas as a result, whilst others said they still felt those connections but found it difficult to see these issues there.

"I think it's a lost town. It's lost its identity. It's lost its direction... If things aren't looked after then it's just managed decline... We're asked to pay more council tax every year... but services continue to get cut and then so people think: 'Well, why am I investing in?'" – Nuneaton & Bedworth Resident

Awareness of current local government structures was mixed

- 4.9 While most residents were aware of the two-tier structure across Warwickshire, when asked exactly how many councils there are in Warwickshire (not including parish and town councils), knowledge was mixed: estimates ranged from 3 to 26.
- 4.10 Residents tended to have some awareness that the County Council provides one set of services whilst the District and Borough Councils provide another. Residents generally suggested that their District and Borough Councils provide what they feel to be 'more local' services such as waste and recycling collection whilst the County Council provides 'wider' services such as education. Others, meanwhile, appeared to have a more detailed understanding of what services are provided by each council. Some however, admitted to having no knowledge of what services are provided by which council. Some said this was down to a lack of interest and

trust in their councils, whilst others said they would only research which council is responsible for a service when they need to know.

- 4.11 In all the meetings, following the initial awareness questions, the facilitator's presentation explained the current local government structure for Warwickshire clearly - to ensure that everyone had a common level of understanding as the basis for the detailed discussions.

Residents were largely undecided on the principle of unitary authorities, recognising potential positives and negative impacts

- 4.12 Following the opening questions on awareness of current local government structures, and the explanatory presentation outlining current local government structures and the government requirement to change to unitary authorities, participants were asked for their initial or immediate views on whether the number of councils (not counting parish and town councils) in Warwickshire should be reduced to an, as yet, unspecified number of unitary authorities (each providing all council services in its area).
- 4.13 Initial views on reducing the number of councils were generally balanced, with residents readily considering potential benefits and drawbacks equally. There were also, naturally, some who leaned in favour of the changes and those who felt opposed.
- 4.14 Most residents agreed the changes would likely provide opportunities for cost savings; streamlining services; reducing duplication; and making service provision easier. Some expressed concerns around bureaucracy which they believed to be causing difficulties for service provision and saw this as an opportunity to remove that barrier.

"I guess the advantage of it obviously is everything's under in one box. It's going to help everything providing it makes it easier." – North Warwickshire

"Everything takes far too long. There's too much bureaucracy. I think any anything that would streamline that process would be of benefit to the area." – Stratford-on-Avon Resident

- 4.15 Others said the changes would be an opportunity to share expertise from staff across a wider area than is currently possible with the two-tier structure.

"It feels like a positive change because of what's been done in the north, and I think they're able to have much more say in terms of say the local transportation and look towards that long term." – Nuneaton & Bedworth Resident

- 4.16 Whilst residents were largely undecided on the changes, numerous concerns were raised from both those who were undecided and those opposed. The most commonly shared concern was that the changes would result in a loss of local voice and representation for residents – especially in areas that are less populated or that have smaller economies.
- 4.17 Access was also a concern for numerous residents, who felt that reducing the number of councils would reduce accessibility to council services. This included a concern that a larger council could result in having to speak to more people before reaching the specific service you require, and a less widespread concern that the changes would mean closing council offices, removing physical access for those in more rural areas.

“If someone is elected probably from Warwick or Leamington, there's going to be that bias to focus on the areas that currently are bringing in the money and leave the vulnerable areas such as Nuneaton and other areas behind. So that's just my worry really.” – Nuneaton & Bedworth Resident

“I just wonder whether there's a danger of particularly, maybe people who are older or people who are in a more rural setting, that they might end up just sort of falling off the radar, because they're not in such a position to state their needs.” – Stratford-on-Avon Resident

“I think one of my main concerns would be... the loss of councillors... Which will then dilute the service again. It all comes back down to that accountability. Are we going to see a reduction in services across the board because of that?– North Warwickshire Resident

- 4.18 Questions and concerns were raised during most of the groups around how a new council would be funded. One question was whether any of the existing District or Borough Councils have any existing debt and, if so, how that would be factored in when creating a new council. Another question was how areas perceived to have better services or lower levels of need would be impacted if they were expected to provide more for areas that are currently perceived to have poorer quality services or higher levels of need.
- 4.19 The final concern was around how budgeting and service delivery would be considered for areas with different needs generally. For example, Stratford-on-Avon was said to likely have more income from council tax than some other areas, but also more anti-social behaviour (ASB). Therefore, it was questioned whether using some of its budget for the benefit of other areas might impact on services around crime and ASB prevention in Stratford-on-Avon. Whether or not issues like these would lead to an increase in residents' council tax bills was a concern raised in most groups.

“Does it mean that for the areas that are more affluent or have more services available to them, that we're going to have to share those out more with people?” – North Warwickshire Resident

“I think there's never going to be enough money going into these budgets and therefore there's going to be some hard decisions to make. And if you're covering a larger area with very different needs, then how is that is going to be divvied up and is it going to be fair?” – Stratford-on-Avon Resident

- 4.20 There was at least some level of opposition to a change to unitary councils in all groups based on general scepticism and misgivings regarding local government, or government in general. These participants argued that the changes would be unlikely to create any tangible benefit for residents, and may also result in increased costs.
- 4.21 Overall, residents were largely divided between those in support, in opposition, and undecided on the principle of a smaller number of unitary authorities. Notably, those who were either in support or opposition were generally willing to give considered arguments for either side.
- 4.22 There were also those who said that whilst they might lean in favour of the changes, they would appreciate having more detail on the changes before firming up their views. Meanwhile, other residents said they could appreciate the potential benefits of the changes, but that it would have to be a priority of the new council to ensure that areas with smaller populations do not 'lose out'.

"I would say it's probably a positive starting point, but I think there's a lot of clarification needed to give comfort." – Warwick Resident

Residents rated quality as their main priority for a new council

- 4.23 During the groups, participants were asked how they would rank the following five factors in order of importance to them for a new council: quality, value for money, accountability, accessibility, and local identity (accompanied by a brief description of what was meant by each). During these discussions, participants gave varied orders of priority but generally agreed that all five factors were important to consider during any future local government reorganisation.
- 4.24 Of all the factors, quality was most often rated as the greatest priority as it was seen as the most fundamental aspect of the services residents pay for and receive. Some added that if quality of service is achieved, then the other priorities are more likely to be achieved also. Some placed value alongside quality, suggesting that in order to feel that they are receiving value for money, then they need to perceive their services as being high quality. Residents also felt it would be particularly important for a new council to consider accountability, given their concerns about a lack of local voice and representation in less populated areas

"Looking at them, they're so incredibly intertwined, but my initial response was to think quality. Ultimately, I think what most people, at least what I want from my council, is that." – North Warwickshire Resident

"Ultimately, if people are paying a lot of money into the Council, it needs to be reflected. So, I would probably say value for money and quality kind of go hand in hand, and I would probably put those at the top of the list." – Stratford-on-Avon Resident

"Quality stood out to me because I think we want a quality service that's giving us what we need in our area, and accountability because we want to know where things are going and what they're going to do about issues that are raised by residents." – North Warwickshire Resident

- 4.25 Accessibility was lower on most residents' lists of priorities. However, it was prioritised by some. Those who felt it should be a priority said that a move to one council could mean that a smaller team within the council would be responsible for taking calls from a larger number of residents. As a result, they felt it would be important to mitigate for this. Local identity was largely believed to be the least important of the five priorities, with many believing that it is a matter for residents rather than the council. In one case, transparency of spending was put forward as an additional priority, with a resident suggesting that any new council should provide a breakdown of how residents' council tax is spent.

Residents argued that having two or more unitary authorities would ensure better service delivery and focus across more areas

- 4.26 After covering the priorities for any new councils, discussion moved on to the available options, notably the preference for having either one unitary authority covering the whole of Warwickshire, or having two or more new unitary authorities. Most residents agreed that in future they would prefer to have two or more unitary authorities in Warwickshire rather than one covering the entire area. By far the most common reason for this was the belief that different areas of Warwickshire have different needs, and that having two or more authorities would allow for those needs to be better met.

- 4.27 Much of this was based on concerns about a loss of voice and focus on smaller, more rural areas, with residents feeling this issue would be less of a concern if more than one authority were to exist. Residents stressed that if councillors are responsible for areas that are too wide, smaller, more rural areas would see much less focus. The population of Warwickshire was also said to be too large for one authority, making it preferable to introduce two or more.

“Nuneaton is very different to an area like Kenilworth. So at least in terms of that split, the people representing it hopefully would have more knowledge of the north of Warwickshire as opposed to the south of Warwickshire.” – Warwick Resident

“[It is a] terrible idea for one unitary authority. It's already breaching the guidelines from the government [regarding recommended population size], so they shouldn't be entertaining that.” – Warwick Resident

- 4.28 Residents also agreed that the quality of council services would likely be better if there was more than one new authority within Warwickshire. It was said that the workload of the entire area would be too much for one authority, likely making it stressful for staff and negatively impacting services.

“I feel like when it's smaller, the workload is a lot less and the jobs that people have to do are less... I feel like the quality would definitely be better with two authorities, because... Warwickshire is big.” – North Warwickshire Resident

- 4.29 Concerns were also raised around the potential for councils to face significant financial challenges, or even become bankrupt, and how that could impact areas. It was argued that if one council were to be responsible for the whole of Warwickshire, then the risks of bankruptcy would be greater since they would represent a larger area. One resident explained that having a larger authority does not guarantee better spending and efficiencies, and drew on Birmingham as an example of a larger authority that has faced financial struggles.

“The example of Birmingham... larger does not mean better spending of money or necessarily more efficiency within local authorities.” – Warwick Resident

- 4.30 One resident argued that having two authorities would give areas more ‘bargaining power’ within a strategic authority to ensure they receive sufficient focus on strategic planning for their economies and transport.

“I think having the two... gives us that bargaining power. We're our own entity. Then we can create our own identity as an area.” – Nuneaton & Bedworth Resident

- 4.31 Although most residents favoured having two or more authorities, there was a minority who favoured having only one. Those who argued in favour of one authority for the whole of Warwickshire said it would ensure more consistent service delivery; maximise potential for streamlining, cost savings and efficiency; and create a bigger ‘pot’ of funds to focus on areas with the highest needs. Some residents who argued in favour of having two or more authorities also agreed that these could be potential benefits of having just one single authority, but felt they did not outweigh the benefits of having two or more. A small number of residents who prioritised access, and whose preference was for two or more authorities, said they would be willing to

consider one authority for Warwickshire, provided that council could be guaranteed to be sufficiently accessible to residents from across the entire area.

“[Having one authority could create] financial savings and therefore being able to spend more on some of the places that perhaps aren't getting what they need, for example areas that are particularly poverty stricken or rural areas.” – Stratford-on-Avon Resident

Most residents supported the North/South model as the best option available, given the need for change

- 4.32 Finally, facilitators of the groups explained the proposal for the North/South model using the presentation slides, before opening up discussion from the group to hear their thoughts.
- 4.33 Some residents had limited enthusiasm for the North/South model, due to their opposition to, or scepticism around, the introduction of unitary authorities. Most however, expressed their support for the model as the best approach, given the need for change.
- 4.34 The main benefit of the North/South model was said to be that it would give both authorities an ideal population size. Numerous residents said they would feel more comfortable being represented by a council with the population sizes suggested under the model, rather than under one council with the entire combined population of Warwickshire. Linked with this, North Warwickshire residents felt that the North/South model would best ensure focus on their local areas, benefiting the services they receive.

“I can see the definite benefits to that plan, and having the two would definitely be better in terms of population size as well.” – Warwick Resident

“Looking at the amount of people... I would feel safer with the two [authorities]... I would hope that I would get a better service.” – North Warwickshire Resident

- 4.35 In addition to these perceived benefits, one resident from Nuneaton & Bedworth said the model could benefit residents in the North Warwickshire authority by allowing them access to grammar schools in Rugby. Another said it could allow a council to focus on the economic potential of North Warwickshire, building businesses and infrastructure in the area instead of focussing on existing opportunities in the south.
- 4.36 The main concern about the North/South model was the economic disparity between the two areas, which could exacerbate over time. It was felt by many residents that dividing the area into North and South would disadvantage the North, which might stagnate economically whilst the South grows. Residents from across districts and boroughs in the north and the south shared these concerns, and felt it is something that would need mitigation if the proposal did go ahead.

“I can't see the advantage to the north of splitting away from the south because any wealth in Warwickshire is down in the South, or it seems to be so. They've lost all the industry in the north. There isn't much in terms of employment there. So, I think the fairest thing would be a single council for the whole county.” – Stratford-on-Avon Resident

“I’m convinced that in 10 years’ time that divide is only going to get bigger and the South are just going to get further and further away from the North... You’ve only got to look at that map to see where all the money is and where everything’s going.” – Nuneaton & Bedworth Resident

- 4.37 Disaggregation of County Council services that are currently provided across the whole area, was a concern for some residents, who questioned how the North/South model would impact service provision. Residents were concerned about the funding of different services following disaggregation, and whether the quality could be impacted, and potentially vary across both areas.
- 4.38 Some residents were unable to fully support or oppose the North/South model, recognising the range of potential advantages and disadvantages in relation to each of the authorities that would be created. Many felt that its success would considerably depend on the work done by Councillors following implementation.

“I think both [authorities] will have their own advantages and disadvantages. It’s sort of how you lean into it is the main thing and the implementation.” – Nuneaton & Bedworth Resident

- 4.39 Multiple residents voiced their frustration with the situation, and felt that more detail is needed for them to understand the impact of the likely reduction in the number of councillors; the impacts of disaggregation; and the impacts on council tax. One resident feared that a decision of how the new council(s) would be formed had already been made, whilst another suggested the motivation for the changes was to increase council tax revenue. Another felt that a breakdown of the cost of the reorganisation should be made available to residents.

Summary

- 4.40 Residents were not wholly decided on the principle of the reorganisation, recognising potential benefits as well as negative impacts. Most agreed the reorganisation would provide cost savings, reductions in duplication and potential to streamline services. Others said it could be an opportunity to share expertise from staff across a wider area than is currently possible with the two-tier structure. Others were concerned that areas with smaller populations would receive less focus and would lose access to quality services as a result.
- 4.41 Quality of services was rated as residents’ highest priority, closely followed by value for money. Accessibility was listed as a lower priority for some, whilst others rated it as their main concern.
- 4.42 Residents largely agreed that if a decision to create unitary councils was taken, it would be better to have two authorities for Warwickshire to ensure that focus remained on local issues and councils were accessible to residents. Participants agreed that the needs of areas such as Nuneaton and Bedworth in the North are different to those such as Kenilworth in the South. As a result, the North/South model was supported as the preferred option. There was however, a minority favouring having just one new authority covering the whole of Warwickshire, believing that as well as maximising potential for cost savings and efficiencies, it might provide more consistent service delivery across the County.

5. Focus Group with Service Users

Overview

- 5.1 A focus group was convened with users of particular council services that might potentially be impacted by possible changes. Participants were primarily recruited from engagement questionnaire respondents who had indicated that they (or someone else in their household that they care for) used Housing Services (including affordable and council housing, waiting lists, housing repairs and homelessness prevention) or Social Care Services (including for adults and children, and support for vulnerable people).
- 5.2 ORS facilitated an online focus group with these services users, who lived across Warwickshire. The group was attended by four people. As with the other residents' focus groups, the aim was to inform participants of the need for change and the potential options, including the North/South model, and to encourage deliberative discussion and feedback.
- 5.3 One telephone interview was carried out by an ORS facilitator with a fifth participant who had been unable to attend the group. This interview lasted around 30 minutes and included the facilitator covering the same information as in the workshop to ensure the participant had the opportunity to provide more informed feedback.

Main findings

Participants explained their connection to their local areas and highlighted differences across the county

- 5.4 Service users were asked about their connection to their local areas, and to Warwickshire as a whole. During the discussion, participants expressed their affection to their local areas and suggested it extends to Warwickshire as a whole, although to a lesser extent. They explained that Warwickshire is a diverse county with its urban, industrious towns and also rural towns and villages in the countryside.

"It's a very beautiful county and it's got very extreme differences. So, you've got the big cities and the very industrial areas, but you've also got then the beautiful countryside and smaller towns like Stratford. And then you've got the villages and the small communities." – Service User

"I think Stratford first and foremost, but Warwickshire as well. But... You can just see how separate it is geographically in terms of the reason north and south. Quite clearly, different parts of it. And I guess when I think of Warwickshire, I do tend to think of Stratford and Warwick." – Service User

Service Users worried that larger councils would be less accessible

- 5.5 Service Users were concerned with the potential move to a smaller number of new unitary councils. Loss of access and local voice were the biggest concerns, with residents worrying that larger councils would be more removed from service users. One resident described difficulty obtaining a suitable home in their area through social housing, and questioned whether a new council covering a large geography might mean they could in future be expected to accept housing in more distant areas.

- 5.6 The importance your local council being comprised of members of your community was highlighted, and retaining local knowledge with a focus on local areas was also mentioned, with participants believing the introduction of one or more unitary authorities could diminish this. The principle of reducing the number of councillors representing residents was also a concern.

"I do think it's important that it's got localism at its heart. That's the thing. It has to be your council. It has to be people from your community who are making the decisions." – Service User

- 5.7 Although the conversation largely focussed on the potential negative impacts of reorganisation, one participant, who was concerned about the possible changes, did agree that it could in future reduce confusion around which council provides which services.

"There is confusion about who's responsible and so on. So, I see the sense in having a single unitary layer where you know, that's your council?" – Service User

Service Users felt that accountability and accessibility should be prioritised by a new council

- 5.8 Potential priorities for any new Warwickshire councils were discussed. As in the other general residents' focus groups, the factors put forward for consideration were quality, accessibility, accountability, local identity, and value for money, and participants were encouraged to rank these in order of importance.
- 5.9 Accountability was agreed to be the most important priority for a new council. It widely felt by the group that a larger council would be more 'faceless' and have less accountability for the decisions it makes. Recent issues faced by Birmingham City Council were put forward as an example of a larger council lacking accountability for its decisions.

"... If you look at Birmingham, big council, and they can't even collect bins. And how ridiculous is that and what accountability has there been for getting in that position?... There's been no accountability. There's nobody that's held their hands up. There's nobody that's made it right." – Service User

"That's my biggest concern, with the bigger the organisation, the less accountability there is, because the big boys are at the top." – Service User

"My biggest concern with this proposal is there will be even less accountability and there is a bigger risk for mispending and finances going in the wrong areas. And the service not being provided that should be." – Service User

- 5.10 Access was of similarly high priority for this group, with participants worrying that councillors and service providers would become more difficult to reach if larger councils were introduced. One participant praised their local councillor for being so available to residents who have concerns and issues, and questioned whether this might become less common if things were to change. Another suggested that a reduction in the accessibility of the council could impact older residents in particular, who often have less access to transport and lower digital literacy.
- 5.11 Quality, local identity and value for money were discussed less, and felt to be slightly less of a priority for these participants.

Service Users all preferred to have two or more councils for Warwickshire

- 5.12 When the appropriate number of councils for Warwickshire was discussed, all of the participants expressed complete support for having more than one council in future, i.e. wanting two or more authorities.
- 5.13 Mostly, participants based this on the belief that it would prevent services and councillors from becoming too removed from their local communities. Warwickshire was also said to be too large – both in population and geographical size – to have only one council, and fears that the workload would be too great for its staff.
- 5.14 Participants also agreed that the North and South of Warwickshire have different needs, with one participant explaining how areas in the south rely on tourism, whilst those in the north do not.

“If you look at the map, it doesn't make sense to be one authority... I mean Stratford, Warwick, Cotswolds and to Shipstone, it's all about tourism primarily and a large rural area. Whereas if you go up into the Nuneaton and Bedworth and Rugby, tourism isn't by any means such a big deal. So, it's different conflicting issues in the different areas.” – Service User

- 5.15 After considering these points, one resident said that having two authorities would ‘tick all the boxes’ by ensuring that services and focus remain localised; population sizes remain manageable between authorities; and that the needs of communities are better met.

“[Having] two authorities seems to tick all the boxes. It's big enough to be able to do the job, but small enough to have local accountability [and] be rooted in the area that it's governing...I think it's a good idea.” – Service User

Service Users supported the North/South model for catering to the differences between the two areas

- 5.16 While participants largely remained opposed to the principle of replacing the existing two-tier system, *if* new unitary councils were to be created, they unanimously supported the North/South model as their preferred option. Drawing on their previous comments, the group agreed that the northern and southern regions of Warwickshire have their own distinct needs and therefore felt this model best catered to that.

“Obviously, the physical area of Stratford and Warwick combined is much larger than North Warwickshire. And yet North Warwickshire has the larger population. It just sort of indicates just the difference in terms of population density...” – Service User

- 5.17 Participants were interested whether the two new councils would continue to use all of the existing district and borough council offices, and therefore maintain accessibility for residents, or if they would have only one office each. The latter would be a concern, as it could mean significantly longer journeys for many residents.
- 5.18 The group again expressed concerns around the current two-tier council system being replaced, and the general lack of clarity around what the changes would actually mean for service provision.

“I was wondering whether these offices were going to be new offices put in more central places or whether they will still work from the different [existing] offices because... if you live in Studley or Alcester, it'd be quite a long trek to go to the other side of South Warwickshire to go and visit.” – Service User

“It's all the unknown, isn't it? We're going into the unknown and we don't know how it's all going to work out. That's what worries people, isn't it? That we don't know, and we've just got to wait and see and be told: ‘we're doing this and we're doing that, and you won't really have a say in it.’” – Service User

Summary

- 5.19 Service Users were largely opposed to any reorganisation due to concerns about loss of access and local voice and focus, believing that larger councils would make services and councillors more removed from smaller communities. However, one participant conceded that whilst they disagreed with the reorganisation, it would serve as an opportunity to reduce confusion for residents around who provides which services.
- 5.20 Participants agreed that accountability was their biggest priority for a new council, due to fears that a larger authority would be more ‘faceless’ and take less accountability for its decisions. Access was given similar priority, with participants worried it would be reduced following any reorganisation.
- 5.21 Service Users preferred to have two authorities for Warwickshire rather than one, and supported the North/South model. Participants preferred this option, believing it would avoid services and councillors from becoming too removed from local communities. They also agreed that the North and South have the most distinctly different needs of any areas in Warwickshire, making it the most logical way of dividing the county.

6. Town and Parish Council workshops

Overview

- 6.1 Two online workshops were scheduled, and the district and borough councils invited representatives from town and parish councils, and clerks, across Warwickshire to attend whichever event was most convenient. The schedule of events and attendance levels can be seen in the table below.

Table 8: Stakeholder focus groups dates and attendees

Group	Time and Date	Number of Attendees
Town and Parish Council workshops (1)	Thursday 4 th September 2025, 4pm – 6pm	13
Town and Parish Council workshops (2)	Thursday 11 th September 2025, 4pm – 6pm	14
	Total	27

- 6.2 The well-informed participants took a very active interest in the discussions. In fact, most of them were already familiar with the general local government reorganisation debate and had formed opinions on the issues under consideration before attending the workshops¹⁰.
- 6.3 In the two meetings, the issues were presented and the discussions facilitated and reported by ORS. The meetings lasted for two hours, and the ORS presentation outlined the current council configuration across Warwickshire; the devolution and local government reorganisation agenda underpinning the proposals; the options for change, and importance of particular factors; and the rational and potential impacts of the North/South model. Participants were encouraged to ask questions throughout, and the meetings were thorough and truly deliberative in listening to and responding openly to a wide range of evidence and issues.

Main Findings from Town & Parish Council workshops

Town and Parish Councillors were concerned about how the changes could impact on their existing responsibilities

- 6.4 When discussing the principle of local government reorganisation, the group gave considered responses, agreeing that the changes could make it simpler for residents and businesses to access the relevant council and its services, and that efficiencies and cost savings could be achieved. However, the group had numerous concerns about the changes and wanted to better understand the implications.

“I think there's some clear potential benefits, not least financial efficiencies.”

“It would certainly be simpler to have unitary authorities and then parishioners at least would know where they have to go for something. Whereas at the moment so many people have no concept of what's organised by county or borough.”

¹⁰ Please note that while some attendees were presenting the views of their town and parish councils as a whole, others stated that their councils had yet to discuss and form a collective view on the proposals and so they were expressing their personal views as a councillor.

- 6.5 The potential impact the changes could have on access and representation was a concern; it was questioned whether councillors would be less accessible and accountable, and whether services would become less localised. It was questioned whether councillors might be less invested in and engaged with smaller communities that were less local to them. One participant explained that their Parish Council has struggled to get their local district/borough/county councillors engaged with them, and was concerned that the situation could become even worse.
- 6.6 One councillor sought clarity on how funding for the new council(s) would be affected by the reorganisation. They suggested that organising new budgets in a way that is deemed fair and reasonable by all might prove difficult, and that any new council(s) would need to be transparent around the issue to maintain local trust.

“Just to say on budgets, they are really hard to disaggregate and it's really hard to do it fairly and it's really important that there's a way of that being transparent to show that one area isn't benefiting over another...”

- 6.7 A persistent concern for the group was whether the changes would lead to increased responsibilities for Town and Parish Councils. Mostly, participants were unsure of what these additional responsibilities might be but were concerned they could be placed on them. It was widely felt across both groups that recruiting T&P councillors is already difficult, and that increasing their responsibilities would make it even more difficult, or even unfeasible.
- 6.8 Whilst most concerns around increased responsibilities were general, one participant raised a specific concern about the potential for T&P Council responsibilities around housing allocations to be increased. They said that it had been suggested to them that following the reduction in councillors across Warwickshire, T&P Councillors might be expected to take on more of a role in housing allocation. They said that the role is too much responsibility for people in a T&P Council role and that many are not qualified for such work. As a result, they said there would be significant reluctance from T&P Councillors to accept this role and that many could stand down as a result. Many participants shared concerns that other responsibilities could be handed from district and borough councillors to T&P Councillors following the reduction.

“Given the difficulty many of us have in recruiting Parish Councillors as it is, I think that Parish Councils will become non-viable if that recruitment is further complicated by the by a requirement that any prospective councillor has to undergo training and to carry a greater burden of responsibility.”

“...Extra housing allocations... It takes us a hell of a lot of time to go through them. We probably aren't as qualified as we should be, and if we're going to get more responsibility, my fear is that a lot of people are just going to go. I don't want to take part in that. It's too much responsibility...”

Town and Parish Councillors preferred to have two authorities and supported the North/South Model as the ideal version of doing so

- 6.9 When discussing the prospect of having either one authority for the whole of Warwickshire or having two or more authorities, Town and Parish councillors again gave considered responses, weighing up the positives and negatives of each option.

- 6.10 Many participants agreed that one single authority could yield the biggest cost savings and efficiencies, and that having two or more authorities could create additional costs. Some also felt that the North could be disadvantaged if the county were split into two, and that the differences between North and South are not significant enough to warrant them having their own separate authorities.
- 6.11 Others who were less supportive of a single authority, suggested that they could potentially support the option if it meant that services became more effective. However, it was felt that currently there is not enough detail available about exactly how, it would improve services.

“There's no demonstrative information that this is going to reduce costs, and people just don't want increased costs. Having these two North and South ones could be more expensive in the long term.”

“I don't see there is a massive difference between the North and South of Warwickshire... I don't like the idea of Warwickshire becoming two separate councils. I think Warwickshire and my councillors believe the same thing as well. “They don't want it to be a county of haves and have-nots” is what one of my councillors did say to me.”

“The single unitary authority might be the answer if all the services were really, really good, but we've no way of knowing until it's decided.”

- 6.12 Though some participants preferred to have a single authority, and most were willing to consider the potential benefits, most leaned in favour of creating two new councils. The most common reasons for this were the perception that the needs of the North and South are different enough to merit having two separate councils; and that the area is too large in terms of size and population to have one authority. Participants also emphasised that keeping services and councillors more local would benefit services and residents, hence their support for two authorities over one.

“It's 60 miles from top to bottom and the requirements and the geographical differences is quite wide, and the needs are different in in the north to the South and the demands are different...”

- 6.13 One participant argued that if Warwickshire were in future to become a single authority, it ought to be part of a strategic authority with Coventry. They went on to explain that Coventry and West Midlands already make up a strategic authority together, and that it is unlikely that Warwickshire would be able to join. A question was raised about what other areas Warwickshire would be likely to join with, in a strategic authority.
- 6.14 If two unitary authorities were created, there was general support for dividing the county based on North and South, although some questions about the scenario were raised. One question was whether service delivery and quality would vary between north and south if Warwickshire has two unitary authorities, and what controls will be in place to ensure service delivery is sufficiently high quality across both authorities? Another was that if Warwickshire is split into two unitary authorities, will they be together in a strategic authority and would any other authorities be a part of it? If so, how might this impact large scale and long-term developments in Warwickshire, such as highways? Many participants in both groups felt that more detailed information is needed about how any future authorities will operate in relation to service delivery, funding, and the makeup of strategic authorities.
- 6.15 Whilst participants sought clarity on these issues, they also praised the district and borough councils for their communication, with both Town and Parish Councillors and with residents.

Summary

- ^{6.16} Both groups of Town and Parish Councillors were well informed and gave considered, well-rounded feedback and questions. Participants agreed that the changes could make things simpler for residents and businesses to access the Council and its services, and yield cost savings and efficiencies. However, councillors were concerned about the potential impact on access and representation following any reduction in the number of councillors, and whether councillors and services might have less local investment when covering a larger area. Participants also sought clarity on what strategic authority Warwickshire would be a part of under either option.
- ^{6.17} Most participants preferred the North/South model to maximise the local focus and maintain engagement of councillors and services, believing the differences between the North and South of Warwickshire to be the most pronounced. However, opinions were mixed with some councillors preferring to have just one council for Warwickshire to maximise cost savings and efficiencies, and reduce the risk of the North being potentially disadvantaged as its own authority, given its smaller economy.
- ^{6.18} Mostly, Town and Parish Councillors sought more detailed information on the changes and the proposals, especially around how any future authorities will operate in regard to service delivery, budgeting, and the makeup of strategic authorities.

7. Business Forum

Overview

- 7.1 Invitations to attend an online forum were issued by the councils to representatives of businesses across Warwickshire. The session was held on 10th September 2025 at 9:30am. The group was attended by only three participants (although this level of attendance is not uncommon in relation to local government reorganisation, as many businesses perceive that the changes will have limited impact on them).
- 7.2 In the meeting, the issues were presented and the discussions facilitated by ORS. The meeting lasted one and a half hours, and the ORS presentation outlined the current council configuration across Warwickshire; the devolution and local government reorganisation agenda underpinning the proposals; the options for change; and the rational and potential impacts of the North/South model. Participants were encouraged to ask questions throughout, and the meeting was thorough and truly deliberative in listening to and responding openly to a wide range of evidence and issues.

Main findings from Business Representatives' forum

Business representatives agreed that replacing the two-tier system would reduce confusion and duplication, and improve consistency of service delivery

- 7.3 Following an explanation of current local government in Warwickshire, participants were asked for their thoughts on the principle of replacing the existing two-tier councils with a number of new unitary authorities (based on the government requirement). Participants were supportive of the change, agreeing that it would simplify businesses dealings with the council.
- 7.4 One participant said that currently the work they do with councils is often duplicated when working across multiple district and borough areas, and so they would welcome the change if this was simplified in future. Another said the changes could lead to better and more consistent service delivery across wider areas, including services for housing, health and social care, and more local facilities such as parking.

"If there isn't good partnership working across services that are jointly delivered, whether it's parking or housing and social care and so on, then I think that it does make sense that the organisations are kind of brought closer into one."

- 7.5 Whilst participants all supported the principle of the changes, some suggested mitigations that might need to be in place. One participant stressed the importance of maintaining appropriate staff levels to meet demand, following a reduction in the number of councils. Another questioned whether staff would be working from home or from an office (if they are more remote from council offices), suggesting it could be harder to contact staff if many were working from home.

Business representatives gave balanced views when considering the number of unitary authorities, but preferred the option to have two

- 7.6 When asked for their thoughts on the potential benefits and drawbacks of having either one, or two or more authorities, participants reflected on the positives and negatives of each option. When discussing the

proposal to have one single authority, arguments in favour were that it more closely reflects the existing County Council, and could therefore be easier for businesses who already have a good relationship with them; a single Warwickshire council might have a 'bigger' voice on a national scale; it would maximise cost savings and reduce duplication; and it could improve strategic planning and ensure consistency of services across Warwickshire, potentially making it easier for businesses to operate.

"Having a single authority, [there's] less in the way of administration. So, then we get into our cost savings [and] reducing the duplication to save money."

"In terms of strategic planning, countywide infrastructure... you've got the potential for uniformity of policies, service standards, etc."

- 7.7 The main argument for considering more than one new council was that Warwickshire is too large and diverse to have only one authority. The group agreed that the north and south of Warwickshire have different needs and that a single authority would be less capable of representing residents and catering to their needs across the entire area. One added that many residents in the north of Warwickshire feel that the area is disadvantaged relative to the south, and that a single authority might impact the north by focussing more on the South.

"I do think that probably something on the scale of Warwickshire County Council is going to be too big... [because of] the diversity and the real sort of differences between the areas within Warwickshire."

"North Warwickshire is very different to South Warwickshire. The communities that make up those parts of Warwickshire are very different. I suppose if it was a single authority then... that's a negative because they're not truly representing all of those separate parts of the authority."

"They are two different communities, North and South. There's absolutely no doubt about that. And historically, the North has always felt slightly disadvantaged."

- 7.8 Other arguments in favour of having two or more authorities were that it would maintain local focus from councillors and on more tailored service delivery; and that service quality would likely benefit as a result.
- 7.9 After considering the arguments for both options, by the end of the discussion, participants expressed a preference for two new unitary authorities.

"It does feel like the two unitary authority option for Warwickshire would give us the best chance of not losing all of the great work that happens at a local level."

Business representatives supported the North/South model

- 7.10 After explaining the North/South model, the group expressed their general support for it. Having already discussed their views that the north and south of Warwickshire have different needs, the group felt the model was appropriate. The group agreed that it would allow for services to be better tailored to the needs of residents, and that individual needs of smaller areas would receive more focus. One participant questioned how existing partnerships between the County Council and businesses in Warwickshire would be impacted

by the disaggregation of services between north and south. Whilst maintaining support for the model, they still felt this was a concern that would need explaining and addressing.

“The voices that will be heard will be slightly different and hopefully you would get better engagement between the communities and the authorities, so the communities might feel better connected.”

“The north and the south is a much simpler split. It's a clearer split... I think they've justified it in a much better way compared to a single authority.”

“It's a difficult but my feeling is that a North/South split should be more advantageous...”

Summary

- 7.11 Business representatives supported the reorganisation to unitary authorities, believing it would simplify their dealings with the council and reduce duplication. Although the group supported this change, they stressed that a new council would need to be sufficiently staffed to meet the demand of residents across a larger area.
- 7.12 Business representatives expressed arguments for both options: one single council, or two new unitary councils for Warwickshire.
- 7.13 Having one council for the whole area was said to be beneficial by more closely reflecting the existing County Council, with whom many businesses have a good working relationship; by giving Warwickshire a ‘bigger’ voice on a national scale; maximising cost savings, improving strategic planning and ensuring consistency of services across Warwickshire.
- 7.14 Arguments in favour of having two authorities were that a single authority might not be best placed to cater to the needs of different areas across Warwickshire; that residents in the North of Warwickshire might receive less focus than those in the South if they shared a single unitary authority; and that the quality of service delivery across both areas might be better, given the more local focus if two new authorities were created.
- 7.15 Participants voiced general support for the North/South model, believing it to be the optimum way of splitting the area, based on different needs. The group felt the North/South model would allow for services to focus on the needs of each area more effectively, benefiting residents.

8. Voluntary and Community Sector Workshop

Overview

- 8.1 A deliberative workshop with five Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) representatives from across Warwickshire was held virtually on 3 September 2025. ORS worked in collaboration with the councils to prepare informative stimulus material for the groups before facilitating the discussions and preparing this independent report of findings.
- 8.2 The group was independently facilitated by ORS. It began with a presentation outlining the council set-up across Warwickshire; the devolution agenda and reasons for change; the options for change; and the rationale for and potential impacts of the North/South model. The meetings were thorough and truly deliberative in listening to and responding openly to a wide range of evidence and issues.

Main findings from VCS focus group

Views were largely positive on current local government structures across Warwickshire

- 8.3 Views on the current local government structure in Warwickshire were largely positive. Some participants described the two-tier system as effective and efficient and questioned the need to replace it, despite understanding the principles underpinning the change.

“Although I can understand the principle of replacing a two-tier system, we actually have an effective locally- run system of two tiers, which already works really well from the point of view of me as a resident and also actually in terms of the organisation I work in and the funding that we have.”

- 8.4 In addition, VCS representatives referred to the positive relationships that they have built up over time hold with local councils, with some expressing concern over the loss of these relationships on the adoption of a unitary system.

“My most pressing concern is that the process of moving from the system we have now to the one that we may well get... It's going to [mean] a degree of upheaval in people's minds... The history that we have with local authorities could be lost.”

Some VCS representatives supported the principle of unitary authorities, but were uncertain around realising the proposed benefits of doing so

- 8.5 VCS representatives ultimately supported the principle of replacing the current two-tier system with unitary authorities to increase efficiency, cut duplication and cost, better streamline services, and reduce bureaucracy.

“My hope is that by saving money at a senior level, perhaps there will be more money that's coming to the frontline so that we can provide better services.”

- 8.6 Participants also acknowledged the advantages associated with having fewer councils to interact with, noting that unitarisation could streamline communication and decision-making processes. Additionally, it was seen as a potential opportunity for larger county-wide contracts, enabling improved service delivery across the region.

“I wonder whether it's actually going to mean less conversations for us and bigger contracts for us in terms of, ‘We want to provide services across the whole of Warwickshire and make sure that everybody is getting that same service in in their postcode.’”

- 8.7 However, there was some uncertainty around whether these potential benefits would be realised in practice. In particular, it was suggested that, historically, mergers have not resulted in predicted savings being realised.

“I think the principle, if it's around economy of scale and financial efficiency, that feels good... But at the moment the uncertainty is outweighing the potential... and once we've gone quite a long way down that track there's no coming back from that. So, I understand the principle.”

“I'm very sceptical about these financial efficiencies. There isn't a lot of history about with financial efficiencies, in mergers and I've been responsible for some very large mergers.”

VCS representatives raised concerns about the potential loss of funding and local voice

- 8.8 Participants expressed concern that the move to unitary authorities would have a major impact on the VCS in Warwickshire. Concerns were expressed around the practical implications of moving to unitary authorities, again raising the prospect of losing good working relationships (developed over many years) between councils, VCS organisations, and communities, which could result in less local expertise and poorer service quality. It was felt that unitarisation would alter these relationships and impact their ability to secure funding in future.

“I'm obviously worried about the fact that we do have relationships with different individuals and we have the go to people that we can talk to about funding and that will all change when you reorganise. It's such a long process that we could lose some of that history and some of those relationships that we have. So, so that bit of me is concerned.”

- 8.9 Participants felt that local councils would need to be inwardly focused during the transition, and as a result would sideline external priorities like development opportunities for VCS organisations. This shift of focus could, it was felt, disrupt established VCS relationships with local authorities, especially where previous contacts move posts; and lead to reductions in current support for both councils and residents.

“For local authorities it will all be about what's happening to them and therefore the outside organisations and development and opportunities... goes off the boil. Everyone's focus shifts and the history that we have with local authorities, could be lost as people that we've worked with for many years move on. The upheaval and the impact on smaller charities, organisations... it's going to have a massive impact on the support that lots of us offer to councils, tenants, and residents in the area for the non-statutory services that we all provide.”

- 8.10 Furthermore, it was argued that the way in which funding is allocated would be different and more complex within a unitary structure; and that regardless of the chosen configuration, funding would probably not match current allocations.

“My concerns would be the impact of funding, certainly for the charity sector, and what that looks like in the longer term because there's a strong possibility that that's going to get much more difficult.”

“Whatever comes out of this consultation, whether it's one authority or two authorities, we're really concerned about the funding that we would receive. It's very unlikely whether we go to one or two that either new organisation will make up the funding that we currently get from districts.”

- 8.11 Participants expressed concern that potential funding cuts could negatively affect how resources are allocated, and funding is distributed, putting pressure on organisations to make contingency plans and potentially harming the voluntary sector as a whole.

“Just listening to colleagues around the table and ...if they're already scenario planning for the worst possible outcome and concern about what that means in terms of cuts to non-statutory funding, ...that then passes down the chain... So, [there is] only a certain amount of money every year ... that means that's a concern for us if we're going to be under more pressure.”

- 8.12 Concerns were also raised about reduced political representation through unitarisation. Participants felt that expecting Town and Parish councils to address the anticipated democratic deficit is unrealistic, as they are already overstretched and unable to take on additional responsibilities.

“... My greatest worry about some of this is the lack of democracy in it. Some of this has been justified on the basis that parish councils will be able to take over... Well, that's just not going to happen... With greatest respect to parish councils, they're struggling as it is, to do the little jobs that they currently have to do.”

Most of the VCS representatives considered access to be the most important priority for a new council or councils

- 8.13 When asked to rank important criteria for future local government arrangements, most VCS representatives chose access as their top priority, followed by value for money/sustainability and quality. Their rationale was that quality and cost-effectiveness are irrelevant if services are not accessible to users.

“... It's the accessibility that's really that's important. I mean, it's already difficult enough for people to access councils and local authorities and services.”

“I think access is really important. If I'm going to access a service, I want to make sure it's a quality service when I do access that service and [that quality] is determined by where I live, whether I'm living rurally or whether I'm living in urban conurbation.”

Most VCS representatives supported a two-unitary authority structure over a single-authority structure

- 8.14 A few participants explicitly stated they would prefer no changes to current local government structures but accepted that change is inevitable. They expressed a clear preference for a two-unitary authority structure over a single unitary; despite acknowledging that they currently enjoy a good working relationship with the existing County Council which, in their view, already operates in a manner that closely resembles a single unitary model.

“It actually works pretty well the way it is, but we're not allowed to have what we have [now]. I see the first option, the single unitary as really, really difficult for us all actually, although we have really good relationships with Warwickshire County Council and we work well with them.”

- 8.15 This preference was largely based on participants' belief that a two-unitary authority structure would mitigate their concerns about smaller, local VCS organisations getting lost in the system, losing the 'local voice,' and access to services.

“So much of the work that happens and is so positive locally could get swallowed up and lost, which maybe it stands a better chance of remaining intact if there's two unitary authorities.”

“So, given the two [choices], it does feel like the two unitary authority option for Warwickshire would give us the best chance of not losing all of the great work that happens at a local level.”

“As an organisation, we have very good relationships with the County Council. But we don't have quite as much interaction and engagement with them as we do with, say, the borough councils. And some of that no doubt will be lost if it's one larger authority.”

- 8.16 Concerns were also expressed that should a single authority be chosen, the distinct economic, social, and cultural differences between north and south Warwickshire could be overlooked, potentially leading to decision-making that does not reflect the specific needs, priorities, and identities of different localities. Participants felt that some communities could have inadequate representation and a diminished voice in county-wide matters as a result.

“North Warwickshire is very different to south Warwickshire. The communities that make up those parts of Warwickshire are very, very different. If you're having discussions as a single authority, [then] they're not truly representing all of those separate parts of the authority.”

“They are two different communities, north and south. There's absolutely no doubt about that. And historically, the north has always felt slightly disadvantaged ...”

The North/South proposal was said to be the best option for Warwickshire

- 8.17 VCS representatives generally agreed that the North/South proposal would be the most advantageous for Warwickshire as a whole, as it considers the differing economies and communities across the county. The proposal also addresses the issue of population distribution, ensuring each new authority falls within central government's suggested population guidelines, with allowing for ample room for future growth.

"The advantage of the North South proposal, so the two unitaries rather than single, is you are making decision making more local. You wouldn't get that with the single authority, so there are lots of pros and cons... It's difficult but my feeling is that a North/South split should be more advantageous than a single unitary authority."

- 8.18 Moreover, the North/South proposal was seen as a step toward addressing the disparities between north and south Warwickshire, helping to ensure that local needs remain a priority and that community voices are heard within the decision-making process.

"We have raised the fact that it's quite different North to South. So, you can tailor those services, and the policies for the differences between the North and the South."

"The voices that will be heard will be slightly different and hopefully you would get better engagement between the communities, the authorities and the officers. So actually, the communities might feel better connected, if you've got the two as is being proposed."

Suggested mitigations included forward planning and contingency plans

- 8.19 Some participants said they had started forward planning for whatever local government reorganisation brings, setting in motion contingency plans to mitigate for either eventuality (i.e., a two-unitary authority or single unitary authority structure). The impetus for this was again fear that the changes could affect future funding and impact on their organisation.

"We're already working on a crash plan. We worked out how much we get from here and there and what happens if that disappears."

"I'm already starting to think, 'What roles can I do without?' And that sounds dreadful, but how can we double up? How can we do this? [Even] do they need me? Can I manage with a bit less of me, so we can keep that [department] going? All kinds of different things!"

Summary

- 8.20 VCS representatives generally agreed that their working relationships with district and borough councils and the County Council were good, and that the current two-tier system in Warwickshire is both effective and efficient.
- 8.21 VCS representatives understand the principles underpinning the change and supported reorganising into unitary authorities as an opportunity to improve efficiencies, cut duplication and cost, better streamline services, and reduce bureaucracy (providing these benefits can be realised); while also raising concerns around losing local identity and voices, and funding and contract allocation.

- 8.22 VCS representatives generally favoured a two-unitary authority model, believing it would better reflect the distinct needs, priorities, and identities within Warwickshire, preserve local voices, and maintain well-established existing relationships between councils and communities at a local level.
- 8.23 In the event of a two-unitary solution, the North/South proposal was felt to ensure the most appropriate division of Warwickshire and VCS organisations agreed that of the interim plans submitted to government, the North/South proposal provides the best opportunity for the county to maintain its identity and continue to provide good quality services.

9. Key Stakeholder Interviews

Overview

- 9.1 Sixteen key stakeholder organisations were invited to take part in an in-depth interview with ORS to discuss their views on the proposals. Despite extensive attempts at engaging stakeholders, only six of those contacted were able to take part. Interviews took place remotely on Microsoft Teams and lasted an average of 30 minutes. During the interviews, ORS staff outlined the current council set-up across Warwickshire; the devolution agenda and reasons for change; the options for change; and the rationale for and potential impacts of the North/South model. Participants were asked for their thoughts and opinions and each topic in turn.
- 9.2 Stakeholders had a good overarching knowledge of local government reorganisation and the various interim plans submitted to the government. However, we would note that some were hesitant to give definitive feedback, stressing that they work for apolitical organisations and that they will endeavour to work with any new authorities to provide the best services possible for residents.
- 9.3 In addition, participants requested that any direct quotations they provided either not be used or not be attributed to them. As a result, quotations in this section are limited to those who gave permission for their use and are not attributed.

Main findings from key stakeholder interviews

The current two-tier system in Warwickshire was said to be confusing, but also to have advantages when working locally

- 9.4 Most stakeholders agreed that the current two-tier local government structure is complicated, as it is not always immediately clear which council needs to be contacted for which issue.

“... When you're looking at devolution and how we [currently] engage with the various different authorities or even [the] combined authorities that exist, there's a lot of layers that we have to deal with.”

“There are so many times things fall between the gaps of who's actually owning the projects and how they're linking together and where there's obvious synergies.”

- 9.5 Despite this, stakeholders felt they had established good working relationships with local council at both county and district and borough levels, which they were keen to maintain.

“We engage positively. I'd like to think that we've got those good relationships with all the districts and boroughs and the county.”

- 9.6 A few key stakeholders felt that the decision on future structures is something of a ‘fait accompli,’ and stressed that they would embrace change regardless of what these structures look like, working closely with any new authorities to deliver the best outcomes for all areas. In this context, several said they were less

concerned about council configurations than ensuring service delivery and relationships between delivery partners are as effective as possible.

"So, I think there's a little bit of fait accompli. Whatever that looks like remains to be seen of course ...and nobody is surprised this is happening."

"I think the decision has been made, so it's irrelevant what anybody thinks, the decision has been made, government is doing this and it's happening. So ...all we can do is try and embrace, look at the opportunities rather than the negativities, make sure that we are communicating very well with those people that it's going to impact."

- 9.7 Stakeholders also highlighted that as a unitary county, regardless of exact configuration, Warwickshire would have more political weight in Westminster. This, several felt, would be advantageous.

"When the authorities do become unified, they [will] have a lot more punch and power to set their plans and to have a lot more influence on Westminster as well, who clearly hold a lot of the power in a lot of these issues."

Stakeholders were largely in favour of reorganisation, but there were concerns about communication, potential disruption, and a loss of local focus

- 9.8 Half of the stakeholders were willing to discuss the principle of replacing the two-tier system with unitary authorities and said they were in favour of it and accepted the principle of change as a positive that will bring about the potential for efficiencies, cost-savings and streamlining.

"I think the simplification of decision-making processes, and a smaller amount of local government organisations to deal with, most people would agree with So, broadly the principles of what they're trying to do, we would completely agree with."

- 9.9 However, clear communication was highlighted as crucial for change, along with the need to maintain and build on existing positive relationships.

"[It needs] clear communication to organisations about what is happening and a general way of making it smoother in terms of the contact points [that allow] maintaining those relationships going forward."

- 9.10 One stakeholder was more cautious about the prospect of reorganisation and expressed concerns around uncertainty and potential disruption.

"The disruption and uncertainty ... is a concern in itself in that [we] have been through an awful lot of change ... Then to [have to] face a period of uncertainty and further disruption ... it would have some impact around the costs of the changes [in general] and how that might impact in terms of things like support programmes being provided."

- 9.11 Indeed, another stakeholder noted that while the reorganisation has been presented as a way to achieve savings and efficiencies, all change incurs costs. They also felt that the current lack of detail on how savings would be achieved has made it difficult to assess cost versus value and requested more clarity around this in future.

“One of the pros put forward [within the proposal] is that it is about cost savings. But actually, in the short-term, any kind of restructure is going to cost.”

- 9.12 Concerns were raised by three stakeholders around the potential loss of local focus and community representation within unitary authorities. These stakeholders feared that consolidating power into a larger, centralised body or bodies could weaken the connection between decision-makers and the communities they serve.

“It's a large and very rural county, with lots of hidden deprivation. So, it's about how we would make sure the communities are still heard in shaping services through all of this, they don't get lost along the way.”

- 9.13 As a result, stakeholders stressed the importance of maintaining a degree of local autonomy (especially at town and parish council level) to ensure decisions continue to reflect the unique character and needs of individual communities.

“I think ... that there should be some local autonomy at town council level to keep the sense of local pride and local matters that actually are just small issues being dealt with by a local town or parish council.”

- 9.14 In addition, smaller businesses, charities and tourism organisations were especially worried that reduced local representation might negatively affect how funding is distributed, potentially overlooking the specific needs and priorities of their areas.

“... Whatever happens, we will be seriously affected ... from a funding perspective because [when] we go unitary, we can't for one moment assume that Warwickshire Council, if it is unitary, will suddenly just put what our existing income is from all of those districts and boroughs into one pot.”

The two-unitary authority model was preferred by most stakeholders, while support for a single unitary authority was minimal

- 9.15 Two participants felt they could not give an opinion on this issue, preferring to remain neutral. Of those who did, all preferred the option of two unitary authorities over one, arguing that the population and geographical area of Warwickshire is too large to be run effectively by a single council. Having a population of under 500,000 in each authority was also considered advantageous in placing less stress on services and allowing some headroom for growth; as was the prospect that smaller councils would be more local and less remote. Overall, this model was described by those in favour of it as the more balanced of the two.

"[We] support the split of south and north entirely. It's not only the most geographically logical, it's demographically logical and also economically logical."

- 9.16 Stakeholders also felt that creating two unitary authorities instead of one would preserve local identities, ensuring community needs are better understood. They believed this approach would better retain local knowledge and ensure service delivery and decision-making is more responsive to local priorities.
- 9.17 The North/South model was also thought to offer a better population balance than the single unitary option. Indeed, the general feeling was that one unitary authority would cover too large a population to adequately provide for local needs.
- 9.18 However, one stakeholder acknowledged the potential benefits of moving to a single unitary authority, recognising that this could further reduce service duplication and streamline decision-making processes. Fully consolidating responsibilities could also, it was felt, lead to financial savings and improved efficiency; and having a single point of contact was seen as a way to simplify communication and access to support, negating the need for service users and partners to navigate multiple layers of local government.

"From our point of view, it would be much easier to have one single point of contact from an authority perspective."

"... If we were to go [to one] unitary, the pros of that would be a reduction of duplication, the number of meetings we sit in where we see repeated presentations and repeated discussions."

Those who supported the North/South proposal considered it the most logical approach to improving efficiency without losing local focus

- 9.19 Those who favoured a two-unitary authority model generally felt that the North/South proposal divides the county across logical boundaries given the socio-economic differences between north and south Warwickshire. Indeed, it was said that the distinct needs of each area would be more effectively supported by two separate unitary authorities, allowing for a more tailored and responsive service delivery across the county.

"South Warwickshire is a largely tourism ... whereas in the north it's a very different economy, so I think the rationale ... is really clear and I strongly support that."

- 9.20 The disaggregation of services was a concern for half the stakeholders, especially considering the differing economic and political situations in the north and south of the county. In particular, stakeholders expressed uncertainty around how funds and resources would be allocated across the two areas.

"I think [with] having one larger authority ... there's still a chance that political differences between the north and south would mean an imbalance in areas of focus and development. Whereas if you are very clear that the south is a separate authority then the chance of a large political difference between the areas ... is less likely."

Summary

- ^{9.21} While stakeholders commended the existing councils for their local knowledge and expertise, and their working relationships with partners, the two-tier system itself was agreed to be complicated, and duplicative. There was an appetite for change as a result, but also some caution around losing local focus and realising potential benefits.
- ^{9.22} Of those prepared to give a view, more stakeholders supported a two-unitary authority model over a single-unitary model. Those who favoured the former felt it would allow for efficiencies and cost savings while also maintaining local expertise and focus. Those who supported the latter felt it would maximise efficiencies and cost savings; and allow stakeholder organisations to function more easily, since there would be fewer relationships to maintain with different local authorities.
- ^{9.23} Those who favoured a two-unitary authority model generally felt that the North/South proposal offers a good population balance and best caters for the differences between north and south Warwickshire.
- ^{9.24} Finally, stakeholders stressed that they would work closely with any new authorities to deliver the best outcomes for all areas, regardless of local government structures.

10. Figures

Figure 1: Map showing distribution of responses (for questionnaire responses where a postcode was provided)	18
Figure 2: How informed or uninformed do you feel about which services are provided by your borough/district council and which are provided by the county council?	20
Figure 3: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the councils should pursue opportunities to streamline services and make efficiencies, while maintaining good services? OVERALL (individual respondents only)	21
Figure 4: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the government's requirement to replace the current two-tier system with a smaller number of unitary councils to run local government across the whole of Warwickshire?	22
Figure 5: Views on the principle of reducing the number of councils, by local authority	23
Figure 6: average scores attached to the five criteria that councils must consider when thinking about future arrangements for local government, based on a 0 to 10 scale where 10 indicates highest importance.....	24
Figure 7: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal for two unitary councils to run local government across Warwickshire?	25
Figure 8: Views on the proposal for two unitary councils, by local authority.....	26
Figure 9: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the areas covered by the proposed two unitary councils?	27
Figure 10: Views on the areas to be covered by the proposed new councils, by local authority	28
Figure 11: Themes arising in text comments (individual respondents)	29