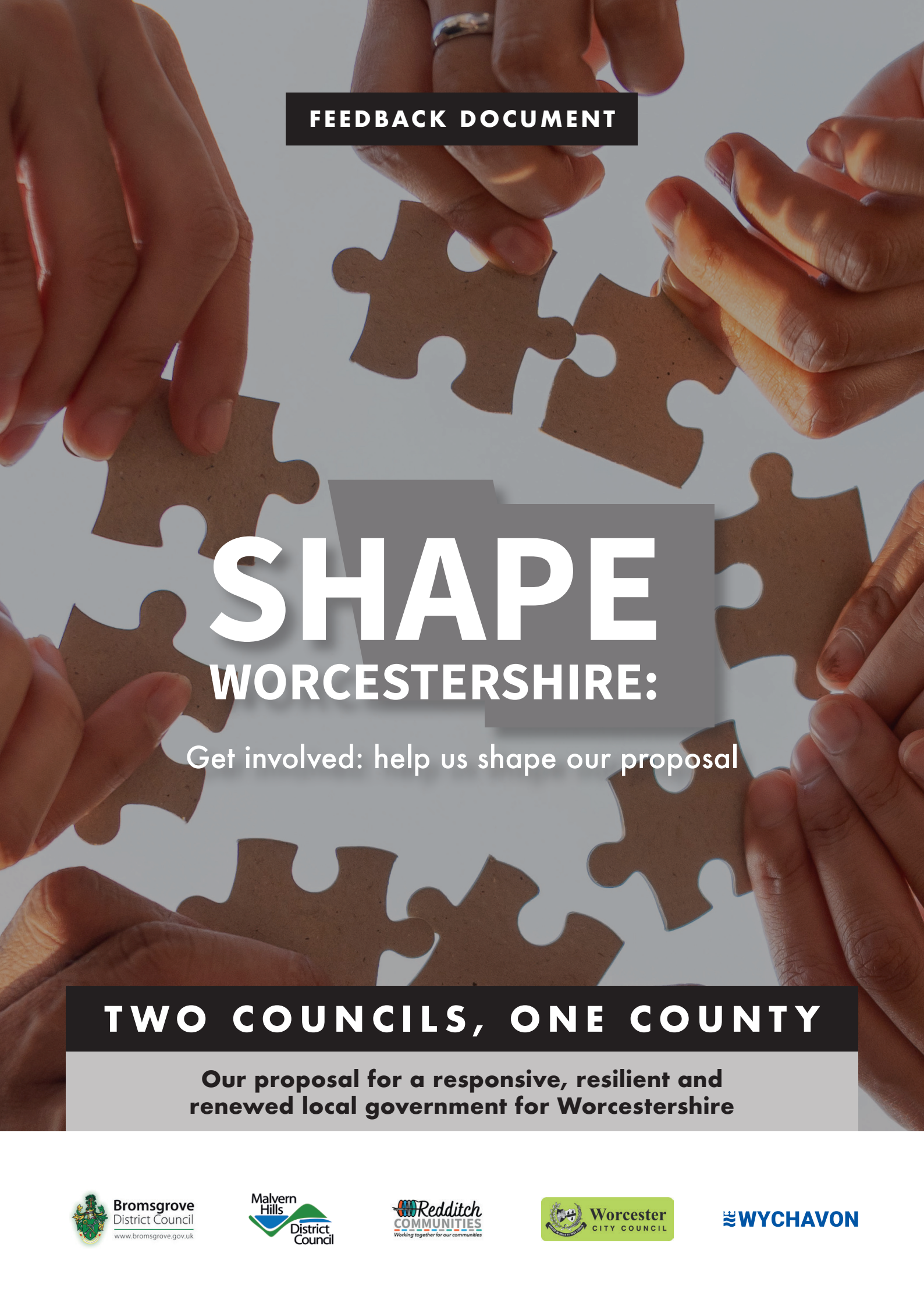




FEEDBACK DOCUMENT

SHAPE WORCESTERSHIRE:

Get involved: help us shape our proposal

TWO COUNCILS, ONE COUNTY

**Our proposal for a responsive, resilient and
renewed local government for Worcestershire**



Introduction

We are currently working up a proposal to submit to the Government to create two new unitary councils to run local government services in Worcestershire. This is in response to the Government's Devolution Bill, which seeks to end the current district and county two-tier system by 1 April 2028.

This leaflet sets out what we are proposing and why. We are also asking for your feedback about how your organisation would work with the two new councils and if there is anything specific you would like us to consider as we finalise our proposal.

Details of how you can get involved are available on page eight.

We believe our proposal will create a promising new future for local government in Worcestershire that is responsive to local need, resilient in a rapidly changing world and renewed to take advantage of the opportunities Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) will bring to improve services.

We thank you for taking the time to help us build a strong foundation from this period of change, so local government can continue to work effectively and efficiently with you for the benefit of our residents.

Cllr Karen May

*Leader of Bromsgrove
District Council*

Cllr Lynn Denham

*Leader of Worcester City
Council*

Cllr John Gallagher

*Leader of Malvern Hills
District Council*

Cllr Richard Morris

*Leader of Wychavon
District Council*

Cllr Sharon Harvey

*Leader of Redditch Borough
Council*

Turn to page eight to find out how you can have your say.

What's happened so far?



The Government invited councils to submit proposals for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) towards the end of last year. All existing councils in Worcestershire submitted an interim plan in February, which set out that there were likely to be two options for LGR in Worcestershire – one unitary council for the county and two unitary councils split north and south. Feedback was received in early June, indicating councils were free to work up both proposals. Worcestershire County Council and Wyre Forest District Council made it clear they would be looking at a one unitary council solution only. The five other district councils - Bromsgrove District, Malvern Hills District, Redditch Borough, Worcester City and Wychavon District councils – were keen to explore both options.

In June, the five district councils and Wyre Forest District Council jointly carried out an extensive public engagement with residents, businesses, partners and other stakeholders that covered every part of Worcestershire. We used a range of digital and paper methods to reach people and also held a series of focus groups to explore key themes in detail.

More than 4,200 responses were received, along with over 4,700 comments collected. Overall, 48% of respondents opted for creating two new unitary councils for Worcestershire – one for the north and one for the south. In comparison, 29% backed creating a single unitary council to run all services for the county.

Analysis of the comments revealed why respondents made this choice. They can be broken down into several themes, including:

- Better reflecting cultural and demographic differences between the north and south of the county
- Keeping services closer to local needs – more agile and responsive
- Local accountability - better at understanding and representing communities
- Local decision-making over issues like planning and housing
- Already effective collaboration between existing district councils
- Concerns about smaller towns and rural areas losing out to larger areas
- Doubts one unitary would save money – belief smaller councils manage resources more effectively
- Concern a single unitary would be too large, bureaucratic and remote

The five district councils also commissioned specialist consultants to carry out a detailed options appraisal, which assessed both the one and two unitary council solution against the Government's six assessment criteria. It also considered the risks, opportunities and savings of the two unitary council model compared to the one unitary council solution.

Based on this analysis, and feedback from the public, councillors on the five district councils voted overwhelmingly to pursue a two unitary council model as our submission to the Government.

What's changing?

Our aim is a successful Worcestershire where every part, north and south, prospers. We will build strong, sustainable and vibrant local places where our residents and businesses can access the support they need to reach their full potential. We will achieve this by embracing the opportunity for devolution, removing administrative and geographic boundaries, and delivering tailored public services at a local level. A more localised approach, through two councils, will enable services to be shaped around what works best for each area, and be responsive to our unique and distinct geographies, economies, and communities.

To achieve this, our proposal will create two new unitary councils for Worcestershire. The North Worcestershire Council will be made up of the geographical area currently covered by the three northern district councils of Bromsgrove District Council, Redditch Borough Council and Wyre Forest District Council.

The South Worcestershire Council will consist of the geographical area currently covered by the three southern district councils of Malvern Hills District Council, Worcester City Council and Wychavon. There is no intention to make changes to any of the existing district council boundaries.

The current and future population covered by the proposed new councils can be seen in the table below:

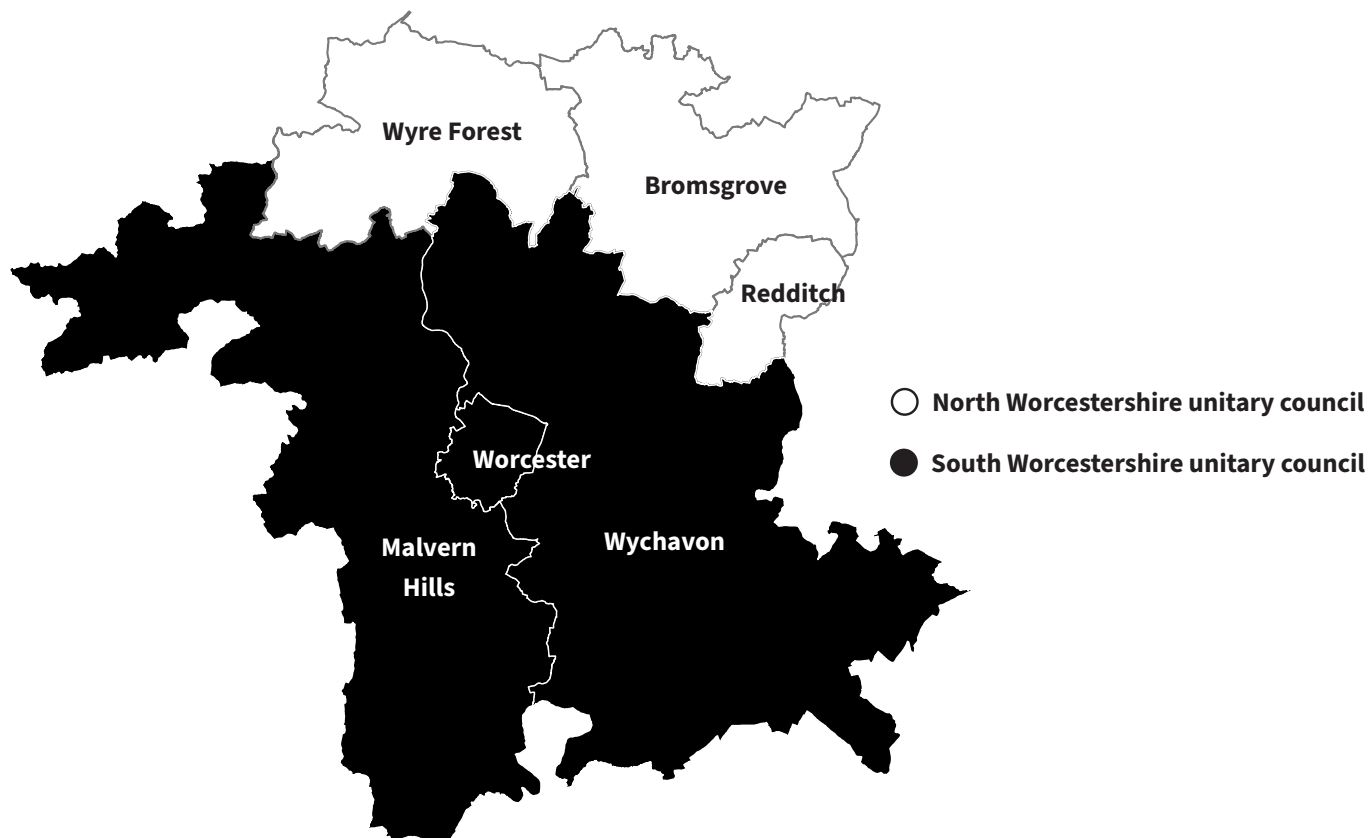
Unitary	Areas	Population (2023)	Population (2032)
North Worcestershire	Bromsgrove Redditch Wyre Forest	290,991	300,133
South Worcestershire	Malvern Hills Worcester City Wychavon	323,194	345,053

Both councils will be separate and sovereign in their own right, running services for their part of the county.

However, our proposal allows space for unity and collaboration where it will deliver the most impact and a better deal for Worcestershire as a whole.

This is particularly true for more complex services, such as adult social care or children's services. For these and other high-risk services, our proposal intends to use shared services arrangements, where it is sensible to do so, to minimise risk, drive genuine transformation and improve outcomes. Shared services are already successfully used by the district councils.





Two councils, one county

There are advantages to having two new unitary councils for Worcestershire and these are explained on the following pages. There will be times though, when it will be critical to act together.

This is not only limited to collaborating over shared service arrangements where it makes sense and will deliver better outcomes. It will also be important to ensure effective working relationships with partners operating over a county or wider geographic area. By working together, we can also demonstrate strength in diversity when arguing at a regional and national level for a better deal for Worcestershire. That's why our proposal has three guiding principles that will lock in a commitment to collaboration within the DNA of the two new councils.

- **Helping our local areas and people thrive:** We will help every area and person in Worcestershire thrive by boosting our economy, building financial and environmental sustainability, and improving lives. Our public services will be closer to people and neighbourhoods, focusing on prevention and working with communities to support those who need it most. This will include continuing to provide good quality environmental and parks services and access to good quality housing.
- **Making services better and more effective:** We will transform and continuously improve our public services, embedding new ways of working with partners across the whole system, particularly with health and community safety organisations. This is to make sure services run well, provide good value for money, and create clear, positive changes for the communities in North and South Worcestershire.
- **Open and collaborative local leadership:** We will be transparent and accountable, upholding strong community values and communicating clearly and honestly. This will be supported by partnering closely with residents and local groups to co-create services, ensuring safe and legal service delivery that supports communities from the start.

Why we believe two councils is the best option for Worcestershire

Our proposal will lead to a future local government structure for Worcestershire that will preserve unity where it matters, while giving space for communities to thrive in their own right. It will deliver local government that listens, adapts and evolves – not by concentrating power, but by renewing it.

The strengths of our proposal can be summed up as follows:

Maintaining effective democratic representation

Having two unitary councils maintains effective democratic representation, with councillor-to-resident ratios closer to the national average. Local decision-making is kept close to communities, supporting greater accountability and responsiveness. The model also supports boundary reviews early in the life of the two new councils. A single unitary across a large population risks a democratic deficit and creating distance between residents and their elected members. This reflects the feedback and concerns from the public engagement consultation.

Tailoring economic and place strategies

Each area can develop a local plan for economic growth that reflects the north and south of the county's different strengths and meets the needs of communities. This allows more strategic place-based development to happen at a Strategic Authority level.

Fairer financial outcomes

There is significant variation in Council Tax levels by district, with northern districts generally paying more. Aligning Council Tax will be easier in a two unitary council model, with reduced impact on residents while cost of living pressures remain high.

Maximising opportunities for transformation

Our proposal provides a genuine chance to examine how complex services like social care, children's services, waste and highways are delivered to maximise transformation opportunities while putting local delivery first. It creates the flexibility to separate services where small is better and to collaborate through shared services where it will improve outcomes, avoiding the risk of a one-size-fits-all approach.

Enabling public service reform to prioritise long-term outcomes

Public service delivery is changing with a far greater emphasis on prevention rather than crisis response. This will only accelerate in the years ahead. Having two councils, embedded in their local communities, offers the agility and responsiveness needed to ensure the local and specific needs of North and South Worcestershire are met.

Balancing local delivery with strategic scale

Two unitary councils balance the strength and effectiveness of local delivery with the size, scale and efficiencies of strategic regional delivery. Research shows smaller unitaries can deliver service functions more effectively with increased efficiencies compared to larger unitaries. It also creates space for us to collaborate where that is better for the people of Worcestershire.

Majority support in the area

Our extensive public engagement exercise, which is being used as an example of best practice by the Local Government Association, shows the public, parish and town councils clearly back the two unitary council option. It comprehensively addresses concerns residents have about loss of local identity, accountability and representation. Councillors on the five district councils have also overwhelmingly backed the two council model.

Reflecting the unique identities of the north and south

Two unitaries reflect the distinct identities and needs of North and South Worcestershire. South Worcestershire has large and dispersed rural areas, but also includes over 200,000 residents living in towns and cities. North Worcestershire is more densely populated and urbanised. These complex differences affect how services are accessed and delivered, particularly in relation to transport, infrastructure, and public service reach. A single unitary would struggle to accommodate these variations in needs effectively. The importance of recognising this difference in identity was reflected in the comments made during the public engagement exercise.

Maintaining devolution flexibility

Our proposal unlocks devolution and regional growth by offering flexibility to collaborate with strategic authorities aligned to local economic and social geographies. It ensures balanced and fair representation within future strategic structures by maintaining a population scale comparable to neighbouring areas (between 180,000 and 350,000) and avoids disparities seen in larger configurations. It creates strength in diversity when arguing for a better deal for Worcestershire as a whole, while representations about needs specific and distinct to each area can still be made.

Strong community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment

Two unitaries would enable a more relational approach with local partners, empowering town and parish councils and VCSE partners to co-operate and shape local priorities and service delivery. Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs) are the government's preferred model of delivery and will include local partners such as town and parish councils and councillors. More locally focused councils are better placed to build trust, increase participation, and deliver tailored solutions to shape the areas to suit the needs of residents best, making areas more desirable to live in.



Why this matters for you

Local Government Reorganisation is about shaping the future of public services for generations to come.

Whether you're a public sector leader, elected member, business, or community partner, these changes will influence how decisions are made, services are delivered, and resources are invested across Worcestershire.

Transforming how we work together won't happen overnight — it takes collaboration, commitment, and courage. But the rewards are significant, including better services, clearer accountability, and stronger, more resilient communities.

Your voice matters. Help us shape a system that truly reflects the needs and ambitions of Worcestershire's people and places.

Get involved

You can help us shape this proposal by answering the following key questions:

1. How can we shape our proposal to support your organisation to deliver services, strengthen local partnerships, and achieve its goals?
2. Please let us know any other feedback and comments that you have regarding a two unitary model for Worcestershire, including your thoughts on risks, challenges and opportunities, and your views on ways to tackle these.

You can share your feedback easily by scanning the QR code on this page, or visit **<https://shapeworcestershire.org/partner-feedback-form>**, and fill in our online form. Your views will help us create a proposal that is informed, forward-looking and truly responsive to local needs.

What happens next?

Our final proposal will be voted on by the five district councils in November and submitted to the Government by **28 November 2025**. A separate proposal for a one unitary council solution is expected to be submitted by Worcestershire County Council and Wyre Forest District Council at the same time. The Government will hold a formal consultation next year before a final decision is announced before the end of July 2026.

Visit **www.shapeworcestershire.org** for the latest updates.

Deadline for responses is 11.59pm on Monday 27 October 2025.

SCAN ME

