



**Nottinghamshire
County Council**

Local Government Reorganisation in Nottinghamshire?

Report of Public and Stakeholder Engagement

**Opinion Research Services
December 2018**

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Opinion Research Services (ORS)

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1. Introduction and Summary

Background

The Commission

- 1.1 Nottinghamshire County Council is aware of the need for governance, structures and processes to deliver value-for-money local government services effectively and democratically. It is considering possible options to replace the current two-tier structure with a single-tier or unitary structure, in which one or two unitary councils would provide all local government services for the county. Any such proposals would not include or directly affect the current Nottingham City Council, which became a unitary authority in 1998.
- 1.2 In this context, the County Council commissioned ORS to carry out a conscientious and independent initial (pre-consultation) ‘listening and engagement’ programme, to understand residents’ and stakeholders’ perceptions of a wide range of issues, including:
 - Current awareness of the number and structure of councils covering Nottinghamshire
 - Understanding of local government finances and council tax precepts
 - Perceptions of the merits of unitary and two-tier structures in principle
 - People’s assumptions and reasons in supporting two- or one-tier local government
 - Relative importance of the criteria for considering the future of local government across the county
 - The information that people might require to inform their consideration of the issues
 - Attitudes towards the creation of one or two unitary councils for Nottinghamshire (not including the City)
 - Possible options for the division of Nottinghamshire into two unitary council areas
 - Other options (including cross-border ‘mergers’ and shared services).
- 1.3 The listening and engagement period ran from October 1st to 31st during which time residents, stakeholders and staff were invited to provide feedback through a range of routes.

Listening and Engagement programme

- 1.4 The listening and engagement process should not be understood as a quasi-referendum or ‘popularity contest’, in which possible options must have majority support to be worthy of further consideration. Accountability means that public authorities should give an account of their ideas and take account of public views; but it does not mean that majority views should automatically decide public policy. The popularity or otherwise of ideas or options should not displace professional and political judgement about what is the right or best public policy in the circumstances.
- 1.5 In this case, as the listening and engagement has taken place at a very early and formative stage in the thinking of the County Council, and there have not yet been extensive and intensive public discussions. Therefore, the engagement reported here is best understood as studying the “starting point” in a potential public debate – to clarify, at this early stage, people’s awareness, attitudes, perceptions and

concerns about local government and possible reorganisation, rather than to determine their considered judgements in the light of detailed debates in the public realm. For example, the engagement was more concerned with people's awareness and understanding of the current structure than with a definitive assessment of their appetite for change; it was more concerned with understanding their concerns and likely reasons for supporting or opposing options than with establishing a definite way forward; it was concerned to clarify their 'mental maps' of the seven districts in the county, and attitudes towards possible combinations, rather than making firm proposals; and it also sought to clarify what further information people might need in order to consider the issues. Above all, at this stage, the County Council wants to identify what options it might consider in more detail (and why), rather than what proposals it should make.

- 1.6 In any case, it is important that both engagement and consultation are not primarily about *numbers* of supporters or opponents, but about the *cogency* of the arguments for or against options or proposals; and engagement and consultation findings have always to be considered alongside all the other evidence available.

Engagement activities

- 1.7 There were three main elements to the listening and engagement programme, namely:

An accessible Engagement Document explaining the main issues and options – which was judged to be 'easy to understand' by 53% of respondents (with only around one-in-six disagreeing)

An Open Questionnaire that was primarily promoted for online completion, but with some paper copies available on request – which achieved a total of 2,926 responses from individuals and 22 from organisations

A programme of Deliberative Events and Interviews – in which the views of parish and town councillors, business people, voluntary sector representatives, and other key stakeholders were studied in forums or interviews; and in which randomly selected members of the public took part in detailed focus group discussions.

- 1.8 In all elements of the engagement it was stressed that the options under consideration did not include or directly affect the status of Nottingham City Council (which is a long-standing unitary council) in any way. That is, the issues and options considered relate only to the 'Nottinghamshire' county area.

ORS report

- 1.9 ORS does not endorse any opinions reported here but seeks only to portray them accurately and clearly. While offering guidance on the consultation methodology and its interpretation, we seek to profile the opinions and arguments of those who have responded; but we make no recommendations on the decisions to be taken. This short summary chapter cannot do justice to the detail of the findings, so readers should consult the chapters following – in particular, for the many text comments in the questionnaire and for the arguments and insights of the deliberative meetings.

Main findings

Open Questionnaire

- 1.10 Based on the informative engagement document, ORS designed an accessible online and paper open questionnaire featuring four main issues – whether change is needed, whether the number of councils might be reduced, whether unitary local government could be acceptable in principle, and whether Nottinghamshire might best form one or two unitary councils. Throughout the questionnaire there were open-ended or text questions in which respondents could explain their answers or make additional points.
- 1.11 Open questionnaires are not ‘surveys’; that is, their findings are not based on systematic or random samples of given populations, and so they cannot be certified as accurate with specified error margins at determinate levels of confidence. While open questionnaires are not representative surveys in that sense, they are nonetheless invaluable in being inclusive, in giving everyone who wants to respond an opportunity to register their opinions – and most consultations would be the poorer without their use.
- 1.12 Typically, the respondents to open questionnaires are more motivated to take part than average citizens, with stronger feelings on the issues in question; older people (say, 45 and upwards) are much more likely to participate than younger ones; and, therefore, the respondents to open questionnaires are not necessarily representative of the general population. In this case, for example, the great majority of open questionnaire respondents felt generally informed about local government matters, whereas most of the randomly selected members of the public who took part in three focus groups did not. Perhaps more significantly, the people aged 45 to 74 are less than half (48%) of the Nottinghamshire 16+ population, but those age groups account for two-thirds (67%) of the open questionnaire respondents; and people aged under 25 are under-represented by a factor of six times. Nonetheless, the findings of the open questionnaire should be taken seriously alongside the deliberative results and other evidence.
- 1.13 In terms of the criteria that should inform the design of local government, the open questionnaire showed that Quality of Services was ranked top, with Accountability and Access very close behind; Value for Money was only a little way behind, with Civic Identity clearly in fifth place.
- 1.14 Half of the open questionnaire respondents agreed that the eight two-tier councils need to make changes to respond to the financial and service challenges facing local government, while 40% disagreed.
- 1.15 On the other hand, only 37% agreed there is a case for reducing the number of councils, while a large absolute majority (56%) disagreed. Around a third of respondents agreed in Bassetlaw (31%), Ashfield (32%), Gedling (33%) and Mansfield (34%), while the level of agreement in Broxtowe (37%) matched the overall result. Views in Rushcliffe and Newark and Sherwood were quite evenly split (with 47% and 48% agreeing, respectively). Around half (49%) of local authority staff agreed.
- 1.16 Overall, in the open questionnaire, only three-in-ten individual respondents agreed with the principle of replacing two-tier local government with a unitary system, while more than six-in-ten disagreed. There was more support than average in Newark and Sherwood, and in Rushcliffe; but only about a quarter were favourable in the remaining districts. Local authority staff findings showed 42% supporting a unitary structure and 48% opposed.

- 1.17 The open questionnaire respondents supported two unitary councils rather than one across all the districts. Overall, almost two-thirds favoured two, while just over a third favoured one. The views of local authority staff were somewhat more evenly divided: 47% preferred one and 53% preferred two unitary councils.
- 1.18 In total, well over a thousand respondents provided (sometimes multiple) textual comments. Not surprisingly, in the context of the data above, there was significant support for the status quo, with over 500 respondents stating their support for the current arrangements, and there were also around 115 comments in favour of increased partnership working. The open-text responses also showed a wide range of ideas about how Nottinghamshire might be divided into two unitary council areas (including, in some cases, recommendations that a southern unitary council should form around Nottingham City). Readers should consult the next chapter for a detailed account of the range of views.
- 1.19 The quantitative results reported above differ markedly from the findings of the deliberative meetings with the public and important stakeholders, so it is crucial that the whole range of findings are interpreted together. Taken together, the questionnaire and deliberative findings show the “starting point” for a possible public debate if the County Council continues to consider the options for change.

Deliberative engagement

- 1.20 In summary, the deliberative elements of the programme were:
- Three focus groups with randomly selected members of the public (34 participated)
 - One focus group with business people (12 participants) and one with representatives of the voluntary sector (9 participants)
 - A large forum with parish and town councils (with 71 participants)
 - Interviews with seven key stakeholders
 - Five written submissions from key stakeholders.
- 1.21 In total, then, 138 contributions were made, most of them within the context of forums, focus groups or interviews in which a wide range of thoughtful opinions were expressed. Obviously, this number cannot be certified statistically as a representative sample of the Nottinghamshire population; but a third were randomly selected (for the public focus groups) and the others were well-informed and relatively senior stakeholders, so their views deserve to be taken seriously.
- 1.22 Overall, the deliberative discussions, interviews and submissions showed a good deal of support for a unitary structure – including:
- More than half of the representatives of Parish and Town Councils (they favoured a unitary structure with a majority of two-to-one); but there was no clear outcome on whether one to two unitary councils would be best
 - Almost half of those who expressed a view in the public focus groups (with a significant number of the others wanting more information before making up their minds); but there was no clear outcome on one versus two unitary councils
 - The great majority of the business focus group (with a majority of three-to-one); and with an even clearer preference for a single unitary council
 - Two-thirds of the voluntary sector focus group (who could accept a unitary structure if it worked well for their clients, but who were divided on whether one or two unitary councils would be best)

Two-thirds of the key stakeholders interviewed who expressed an opinion (but with no consensus on the number of unitaries)

About half of the small number of submissions (with no consensus on the number).

- 1.23 Many of those who did not express a view wanted more information before deciding – including fourteen Parish and Town Council representatives, six out of nine voluntary sector representatives and ten of thirty-four in the public focus groups.
- 1.24 Most stakeholders were relatively open-minded about the structure of local government. They may see benefits in the existing two-tier structure, but do not object to a unitary structure in principle – as long there are benefits and ‘localism’ is not lost. They want decent services, local accountability, good joint working between statutory agencies and others, and an environment within which business, the voluntary sector and academia can thrive.
- 1.25 There were some clear messages about what is needed if a fair and reasoned case for unitary local government is to be presented for formal consultation with the public and stakeholders – including all the following:

Services and functions and quality are more important than delivery structure: if people get the right services they do not worry about where they come from.

Stakeholders need more information: they need to see a business case that includes: a cost benefit analysis, particularly the savings and transformation costs; reasons for the 300,000-population threshold; and evidence of how well other unitary authorities are working (particularly for cost savings, quality of service delivery and maintaining localism (local accountability and service delivery)); and the comparative unitary authorities should be relevant to Nottinghamshire.

Local accountability needs to be preserved: mitigations are needed to avoid inaccessibility and a remote bureaucracy with domination by an urban centre – and some form of area boards or committees (or similar) were suggested quite frequently.

Some participants saw a need for communication with the City and Districts: some felt that the review of structures would be strengthened by the support of the district and borough councils.

Some participants were concerned that the review should take the expansion needs of the City into account: some participants questioned the logic of omitting the City from the possible restructuring, irrespective of it already being a unitary authority

Many people wanted to be sure that district-based talents would not be lost in any reorganisation: there were concerns about the importance of local knowledge for service delivery, especially in planning for health, housing, social care, education and economic development; hospital discharge management and educational support for children were mentioned particularly.

Some people feared that funding for district services might suffer in a unitary structure, given the financial pressures on social services.

The future roles of Parish and Town Councils should be explained: some participants want a commitment that current supportive arrangements will be continued and reassurances that about the risk of double taxation for some areas.

- 1.26 There was no consensus on how the county might be divided in the event of two unitary councils. Some supported a north-south division (though there were variations on which districts should be included in each one, and on whether the City of Nottingham should be the ‘core’ of a southern unitary). Some supported a west-east division as being politically the most acceptable in recognising the interests and

bases of the main parties; but some residents and other stakeholders thought such a division would create 'single party' councils and leave the western unitary relatively worse off. Many of those who supported a single unitary council did so because, while they recognised the differences between various areas within the large county, they felt a single council would be more sustainable financially, and also less disruptive to the existing structure of children and adult's social services.

Conclusions

- 1.27 Listening and engagement programmes (and even formal consultation) on complex and controversial options for local government cannot be expected to achieve a consensus; they should not be treated as quasi-referenda; and in this case the deliberative findings contrast markedly with the open questionnaire responses. Any overall interpretation should take account of *all* the engagement findings as well as all the other evidence available. On the evidence reported here, there is nothing that means the County Council must go ahead to propose a unitary structure; but nor is there anything to discourage it from doing so.

2. Engagement Questionnaire

Introduction

- 2.1 The engagement programme included an open questionnaire based on the main themes in the council's engagement document – to offer an inclusive opportunity for anyone (residents, organisations and any other kind of stakeholder, both inside and outside of the county) to give their views on the issues and options. The questionnaire was available in online and paper formats between 3rd and 31st October 2018 and 2,948 responses were received in total.
- 2.2 Of the 2,948 responses, 22 were received from organisations. Responses from organisations might represent the views of large numbers of individuals or key stakeholders who might be particularly informed about the impacts on their members, or they could raise technical arguments that cannot easily be summarised. For these reasons, ORS typically reports the views of individual respondents and organisations separately.

Respondent profile (individuals)

- 2.3 The table below profiles the 2,926 individual respondents to the engagement questionnaire. Figures may not always sum to 100% due to rounding.
- 2.4 The engagement questionnaire was publicised and made freely available to any individual or group who wished to express their views about options for the future of local government in Nottinghamshire. This means that the response profile is not necessarily representative of the Nottinghamshire population aged 16-plus. For example, while just over a quarter of the adult (16+) population of Nottinghamshire (excluding the city) is aged under 35 (Mid-Year Population Estimates for 2017), less than a tenth of respondents who provided their profile details were in this age group. Likewise, people aged 45-plus are over-represented in data. The open questionnaire findings should be considered in this context; nonetheless they are important and should be taken seriously alongside the deliberative results and other evidence.

Table 1: Individual questionnaire responses by demographics (Mid-Year Population Estimates 2017 for age and gender; Census 2011 for ethnic group and disability)

Characteristic	Count	% Valid responses	Notts population 16+ (excl. City)
BY AGE			
Under 25	48	2%	12%
25 to 34	160	7%	15%
35 to 44	363	17%	15%
45 to 54	482	22%	18%
55 to 64	509	23%	16%
65 to 74	467	22%	14%
75 or over	138	6%	11%
Total valid responses	2,167	100%	100%
<i>Not known</i>	759	-	-
BY GENDER			
Male	1,150	55%	49%
Female	936	45%	51%

Total valid responses	2,086	100%	100%
<i>Not known</i>	<i>840</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>
BY ETHNIC GROUP			
White	1,910	97%	96%
Non-white	68	3%	4%
Total valid responses	1,978	100%	100%
<i>Not known</i>	<i>948</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>
BY WHETHER RESPONDENT HAS A DISABILITY			
Yes	270	13%	24%
No	1,738	87%	76%
Total valid responses	2,008	100%	100%
<i>Not known</i>	<i>918</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>

Table 2: Individual responses by area, compared to the Notts population aged 16+ (Mid-Year Population Estimates 2017)

Area	Count	% Valid responses	Notts population 16+ (excl. City)
Ashfield	238	12%	15%
Bassetlaw	223	11%	14%
Broxtowe	332	17%	14%
Gedling	380	19%	14%
Mansfield	260	13%	13%
Newark and Sherwood	231	12%	15%
Rushcliffe	329	17%	14%
Total responses	1,993	100%	100%
<i>Nottingham</i>	<i>47</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>
<i>Outside Nottinghamshire</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>
<i>Not known</i>	<i>864</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>

- 2.5 Overall, 85 respondents indicated they were town or parish councillors and 31 indicated they were district/borough councillors.
- 2.6 In total, 363 respondents indicated that they were employed by a local authority in or neighbouring Nottinghamshire. They were asked to specify for which council they worked, and 317 respondents provided details. Of those who answered, half (49%) work for the County Council, and 9% work for “NCC” (but failed to specify whether they were referring to Nottingham City Council or Nottinghamshire County Council). On that basis, staff of the County were the most numerous group, and they might well represent an absolute majority of staff who responded.

Table 3: Staff responses by local authority

Local authority worked for	Count	%
Ashfield District Council	10	3
Bassetlaw District Council	18	6
Broxtowe District Council	12	4
Gedling Borough Council	5	2
Mansfield District Council	45	14
Newark and Sherwood District Council	4	1
Rushcliffe Borough Council	4	1
Nottingham City Council	16	5
Nottinghamshire County Council	156	49
NCC (no other details provided)	29	9

Other (e.g. outside Notts)	18	6
TOTAL	317	100%

Duplicate and Co-ordinated Responses

- 2.7 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 questionnaire online, ORS monitors the IP addresses through which questionnaires 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). Few submissions were received with duplicate cookies, and after careful study of these responses, none were considered to be identical responses or appeared to be attempting to skew the results; so we have not excluded any online submissions on the basis of a duplicate IP address or cookies. Similarly, no physical copies of questionnaires returned to ORS were considered to be duplicated responses.

Interpretation of the data

- 2.8 For simplicity, the results for the open engagement questionnaire are presented in a largely graphical format, where the numbers on pie or bar charts indicate the percentage or proportion giving a particular view. Grouped percentages are used e.g. to show overall levels of agreement and disagreement. Where possible, the colours of the charts have been standardised with a ‘traffic light’ system in which green shades represent positive responses (such as ‘agree’), red shades represent negative responses (such as ‘disagree’), and beige shades represent neither positive nor negative responses. Where percentages do not sum to 100, this may be due to computer rounding, the exclusion of “don’t know” categories, or multiple answers.
- 2.9 All open-ended responses have been read and 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.
- 2.10 Only a small number of responses were received from Nottingham City (47) or from outside the county (22). The results from the 47 City responses have been included in the graphics for interest; however, due to the low numbers, the written commentary focuses only on the seven districts and boroughs that receive services from the County Council (i.e. Ashfield, Bassetlaw, Broxtowe, Gedling, Mansfield, Newark and Sherwood, and Rushcliffe).

Summary of the main questions

- 2.11 The graphics below are intended to be clear, but an overall summary can nonetheless be helpful – though it is important to stress that readers should consult the next chapter for a detailed account of the quantitative findings and many text comments.
- 2.12 Respondents claimed to be aware of the current council arrangements across Nottinghamshire, perhaps more so than might normally be expected from a representative sample of the public (as evidenced, for example, in the focus groups conducted). A large majority reported that they are well informed about which councils provide which services, and a slightly smaller majority felt well informed about how local government takes important decisions affecting residents.
- 2.13 An absolute majority (53%) agreed the engagement document was easy to understand, although a significant minority neither agreed nor disagreed. Only about one-in-seven disagreed.

- 2.14 In terms of the criteria that should inform the design of local government, the open questionnaire showed that Quality of Services was ranked top, with Accountability and Access very close behind; Value for Money was only a little way behind, with Civic Identity clearly in fifth place.
- 2.15 Half of the open questionnaire respondents agreed that the eight two-tier councils need to make changes to respond to the financial and service challenges facing local government, while 40% disagreed.
- 2.16 On the other hand, only 37% agreed there is a case for reducing the number the number of councils, while a majority (half) disagreed. Local authority staff were somewhat more evenly split, with 49% in support and 44% against reducing the number of councils.
- 2.17 There was much more support for two unitary councils than for one across all the districts. Overall (if a unitary structure were created), those preferring two councils outnumbered those favouring a single unitary by a majority of two-to-one; and in all seven districts respondents preferred two unitary councils. There was more support than average in Newark and Sherwood, and in Rushcliffe; but only a quarter or more supported the idea in the remaining districts. Once more, local authority staff were somewhat more evenly divided, with 42% supporting a unitary structure and 48% opposed.

Summary of the open-ended comments

- 2.18 Respondents used the various open-ended questions to comment on the possible options, and it is important that the council considers these outcomes of the engagement process. There were many instances where the feedback given was arguably “off-topic” – in the sense that a significant number of respondents offered their *general* opinions in response to a more *specific* question (e.g. about the criteria that should be considered in developing any future proposals). Moreover, although the feedback was wide-ranging, it did tend to coalesce around some broad themes. Therefore, rather than repeating the same ideas many times for every open-ended question, ORS has summarised them below. It is difficult to quantify precisely how many times each view was expressed, because of way themes were repeated across several questions; however, some indications are given of the *minimum* number who expressed each view.

Concerns about the possible options

- 2.19 The largest group of comments related to concerns around the options: over 400 respondents made comments expressing their general opposition to a unitary structure. Specific concerns or reasons for not being supportive included:
- Support for the current arrangement (i.e. the status quo) (at least 500 comments)
 - Concerns about a loss of local identity and/or that unitary government would be less responsive to local needs (at least 270 comments)
 - Concerns that unitary government undermines local democracy and accountability (at least 220 comments)
 - Concerns about access and a loss of local services (with associated increases in travel, etc.) (at least 160 comments)
 - Suggestions that savings and efficiencies could be achieved through greater shared working, rather than restructure (at least 115 comments)
 - Concern that the City has not been involved in the process (at least 100 comments) – along with a smaller number specifying that the current City boundaries are inappropriate and ought to be extended as part of any proposal (though quite a few others took the opposite view i.e. were concerned about the City encroaching into surrounding areas).

- Suggestions that smaller councils are better able to deal with local issues (at least 90 comments)
- Scepticism that the possible changes would help realise any savings (and some suggestion that they would waste money e.g. because of transition costs associated with centralisation) (at least 70 comments)
- Scepticism around whether changing the structure of local government will actually make a difference or achieve the stated aims (at least 50 comments)
- Suggestions that Nottinghamshire is too big to manage with fewer councils (at least 50 comments) and, similarly, that fewer councils will be spread too thinly and struggle to meet the increased demands placed on them (at least 10 comments)
- Concerns about a diminution in quality or disruption to services (at least 50 comments)
- Concerns about job losses (at least 40 comments)
- General claims that the savings could be made elsewhere (at least 27 comments), with others offering specific suggestions on how this could be achieved e.g. by cutting managerial or non-essential staff and councillors (at least 55 comments) reducing salaries and expenses etc (at least 26 comments)
- Concerns that outlying areas are more likely to be ‘forgotten’ under unitary councils (at least 45 comments)
- Concerns about political factors (at least 40 comments)
- Concerns about inequalities between areas and/or new councils in terms of funding or service quality (at least 40 comments).

Supportive comments

Some respondents provided positive feedback on a possible unitary structure, including around 40 or more who expressed general support and at least 16 who felt change was overdue. More specifically, some were supportive on the basis that:

- Change would support more joined-up working, and reduce duplication in staff, services and resources etc. (at least 39 comments)
- Change is needed and/or money must be saved (at least 33 comments)
- There is an opportunity to address inequalities in the way different areas are currently treated (at least 25 comments)
- The current structure is too bureaucratic and wasteful (at least 24 comments)
- Change will or may result in a better service being provided (at least 13 comments)

The engagement process

2.20 There was some criticism of the engagement exercise and the council’s reasons for considering possible changes – for example, there was/were:

- Criticism of the engagement document and questionnaire – for example, that they contained ‘biased’ information or questions (at least 130 comments); or that some respondents were unhappy at being asked to give a preference between one and two unitary councils, when they preferred the status quo).
- Suggestions that local government reorganisation is politically motivated and amounts to a ‘power grab’ or a ‘land grab’, ‘asset stripping’ etc. (at least 30 comments)

Other comments

2.21 Some respondents felt there was a need for more information, and some wanted any future proposal to be subject to a referendum. There was also some criticism of the County Council, and some suggestion that councils should challenge central government over the lack of funding before pursuing a restructure.

- 2.22 Although many people supported parish and town councils having an enhanced role, a few were concerned about increases in parish precepts (which they claimed had happened in Cornwall) and the creation of another ‘tier’ of local government.

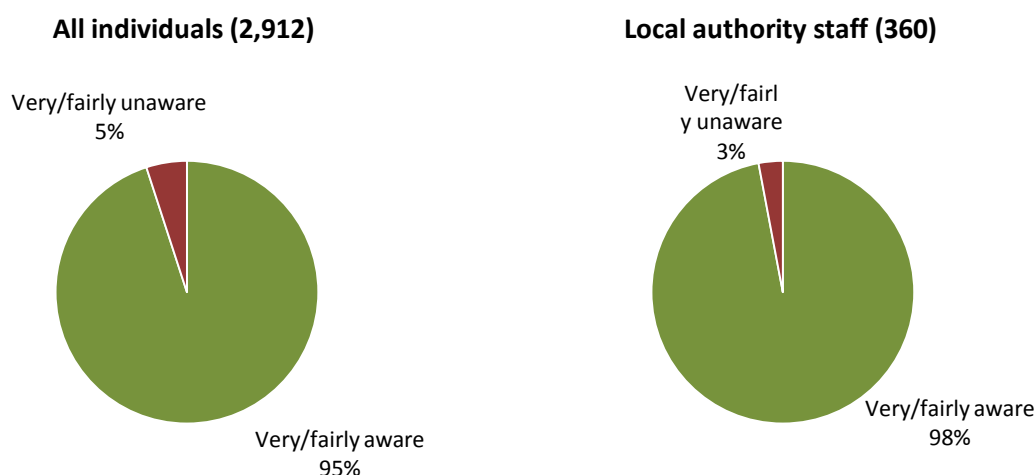
Main Findings (individuals)

Awareness and understanding of the current situation

Before reading the County Council’s engagement document and/or this questionnaire, were you aware that there are 8 separate councils providing services across different parts of Nottinghamshire?

- 2.23 Nearly everyone (95%) reported that they were at least fairly aware that there are currently eight councils providing services, as did almost all (98%) local authority staff.

Figure 1: Awareness of council structure in Nottinghamshire



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?

...how local government takes important decisions affecting you?

- 2.24 The majority of respondents feel at least fairly informed about each of the issues: 86% feel informed about which council provides each service, while 77% feel informed about how local government takes important decisions (this means, however, that nearly a quarter feel uninformed about decision-making).
- 2.25 Almost nine in ten local authority employees feel at least fairly informed about which council provides each service, and around eight in ten feel at least fairly informed about how decisions are taken.

Figure 2: How informed or uninformed do you feel about...? (all individuals)

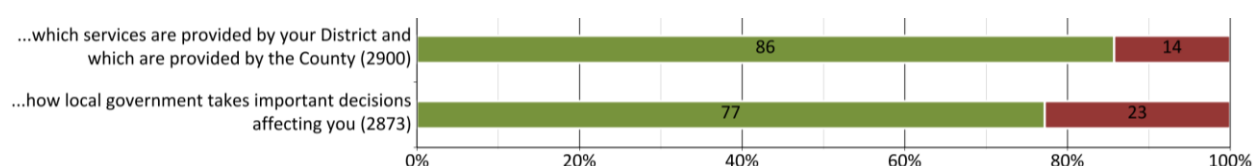
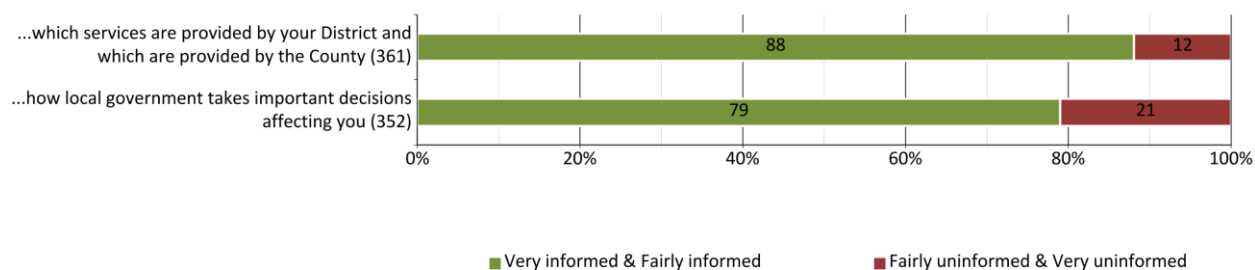
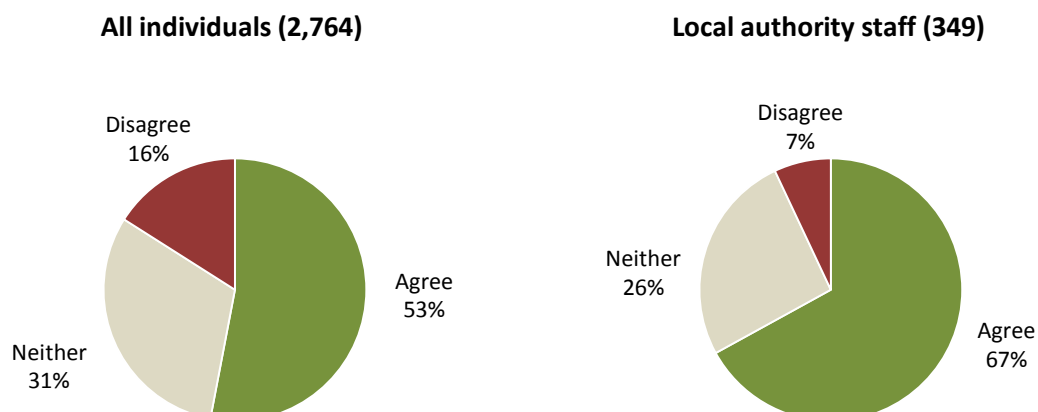


Figure 3: How informed or uninformed do you feel about...? (local authority staff only)

The council's engagement document

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the council's Engagement Document is clear and easy to understand?

- 2.26 An absolute majority of individual respondents (53%) agreed that the council's Engagement Document is clear and easy to understand, compared with around-two thirds of those employed by a local authority. Fairly substantial minorities (31% and 26% respectively) neither agreed nor disagreed.

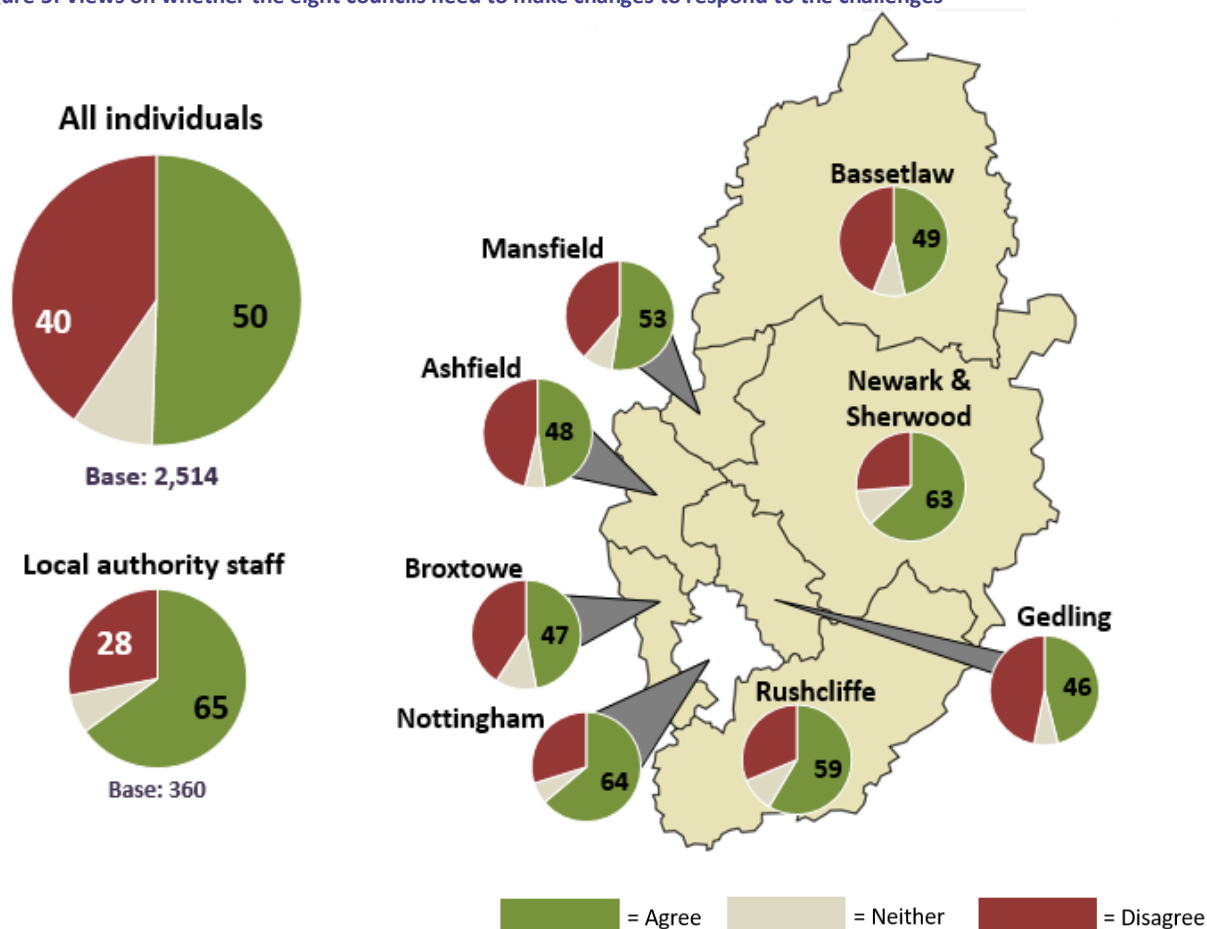
Figure 4: Views on whether the engagement document is clear and easy to understand

The principle of making changes

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the eight two-tier Nottinghamshire councils need to make changes to respond to these challenges?

- 2.27 Half of respondents agreed that Nottinghamshire's eight two-tier councils need to make changes to respond to the challenges, while 40% disagreed. Levels of agreement in many of the seven districts/boroughs were similar; but agreement was somewhat higher in Newark and Sherwood (63%) and Rushcliffe (59%). Just under two thirds of individuals employed by a local authority agreed.

Figure 5: Views on whether the eight councils need to make changes to respond to the challenges



Criteria for local government reorganisation

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.

- 2.28 Respondents were informed that there are various factors to consider when thinking about local government, including: **Accountability** (democratic decision making with clarity about who is responsible for services and policies), **Quality** (delivering excellent local services sustainably), **Civic identity** (that councils reflect how residents relate to their local areas), **Access** (keeping services as local as possible for

as many residents as possible) and **Value for Money** (making savings and minimising Council Tax increases while maintaining the quality of services. Respondents were asked to rate how important these criteria are on a scale between 0 and 10. Average scores were calculated, and the criteria ranked (with 1st indicating the highest average score) to give some sense of the priority attached to each.

Figure 6: Average score of the importance of criteria (all individuals)

Criterion	Overall average score (out of 10)	Rank	Base
Quality	9.3	1st	2461
Accountability	9.2	2nd	2470
Access	9.0	3rd	2467
Value for Money	8.8	4th	2461
Civic Identity	7.7	5th	2468

- 2.29 Looking only at those respondents who work for a local authority: Quality and Accountability were again the 1st and 2nd ranked options respectively, and Civic Identity was 5th. However, Value for Money was 3rd rather than 4th (switching places with Access).

Are there any other important factors that you believe should be considered?

- 2.30 Respondents were given the opportunity to share any additional important factors they believe should be considered when thinking about the future structure of local government. 1,268 respondents provided comments, but not all their comments related directly to the question asked. For example, there were 198 comments expressing general disagreement with a single tier approach and 127 expressing satisfaction with the status quo. Nonetheless, many respondents identified other important factors and/or reiterated the importance of one or more of the five criteria asked in the original question. A summary is provided below:

Figure 7: Other factors Base: All individuals who made comments (1,268)

Other factors	No. of respondents	%
Delivery of services on a local level/meeting local needs	225	18
Need for accessible/competent/locally-based councillors and representatives	177	14
Local democracy	130	10
Access i.e. access to local services/face-to-face access	127	10
Local identity/every area has different needs	117	9
Accountability	84	7
Cost/value for money	78	6
Diversity of districts/communities: one size fits all won't work	77	6
Transparency e.g. around decision making, finances etc.	73	6
Communication	72	6
Political factors (i.e. different decisions made by parties in differing areas)	54	4
Quality (i.e. delivering excellent local services)	52	4
Impact on social care and/or vulnerable/less fortunate people	50	4
Impact on jobs (i.e. redundancies, terms and conditions etc)	43	3

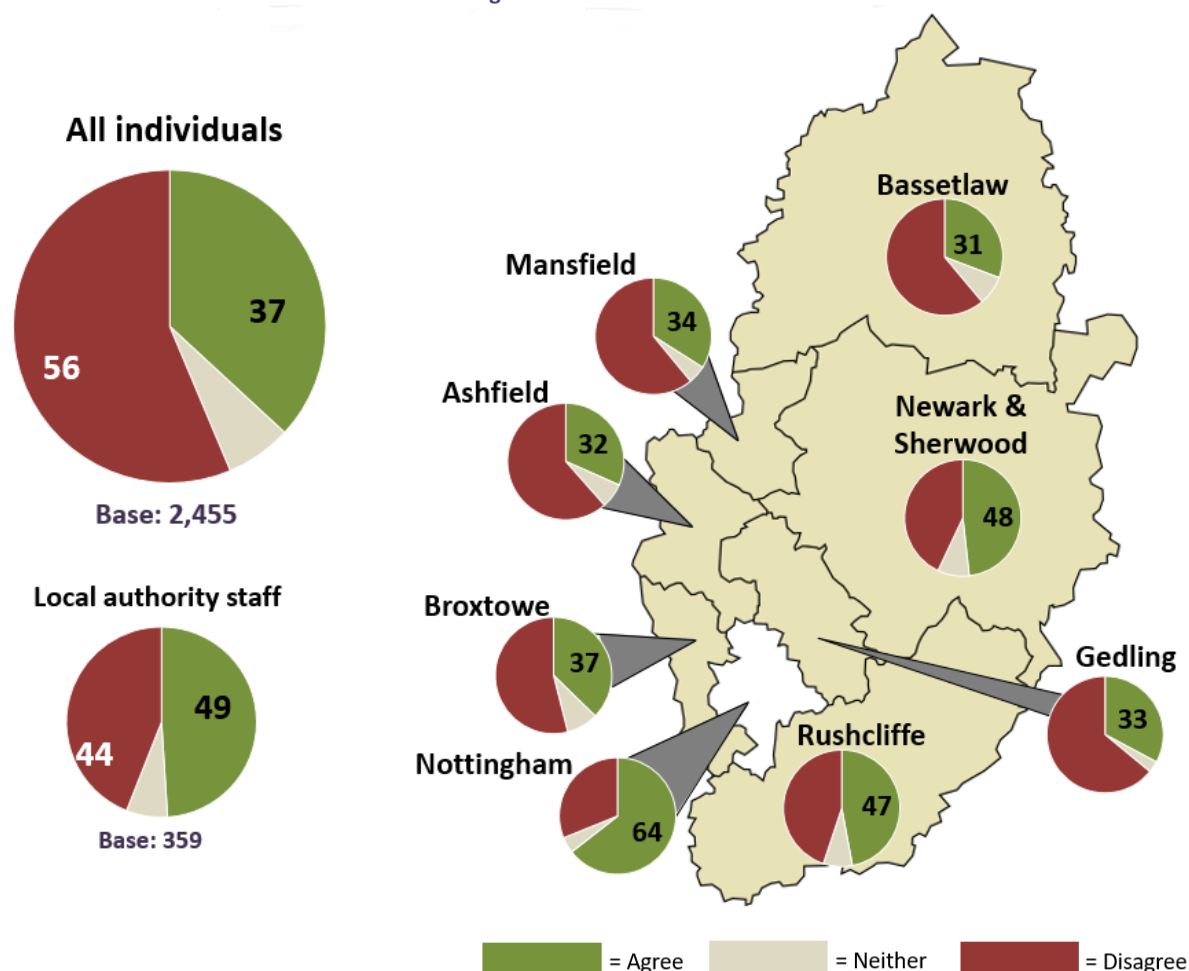
Other factors	No. of respondents	%
Efficiency and effectiveness of services	41	3
Ease of decision making	40	3
Balanced representation	38	3
Consistency of services across the county (i.e. not creating a postcode lottery)	38	3
Impact on rural communities	37	3
Engagement	34	3
Council Tax: variation in charges and services delivered across region	31	2
Funding (i.e. impact on how services are funded etc)	27	2
National status and voice as a region	22	2
Local planning	20	2
Equalities	15	1
Ease of relationship with other bodies/organisations i.e. NHS/other L.A.s etc.	12	1
Technology (i.e. making use of technology to help improve efficiency etc).	10	1
Sustainability	7	1

Reducing the number of councils

Thinking only about the eight two-tier councils, do you agree or disagree that there is a case for reducing the number of councils in Nottinghamshire?

- ^{2.31} Overall, a large absolute majority (56%) disagreed with the idea of reducing the number of councils in Nottinghamshire, while only 37% of individuals agreed. Around a third of respondents agreed in Bassetlaw (31%), Ashfield (32%), Gedling (33%) and Mansfield (34%), while the level of agreement in Broxtowe (37%) matched the overall result. Views in Rushcliffe and Newark and Sherwood were quite evenly split (with 47% and 48% agreeing, respectively). Around half (49%) of local authority staff agreed.

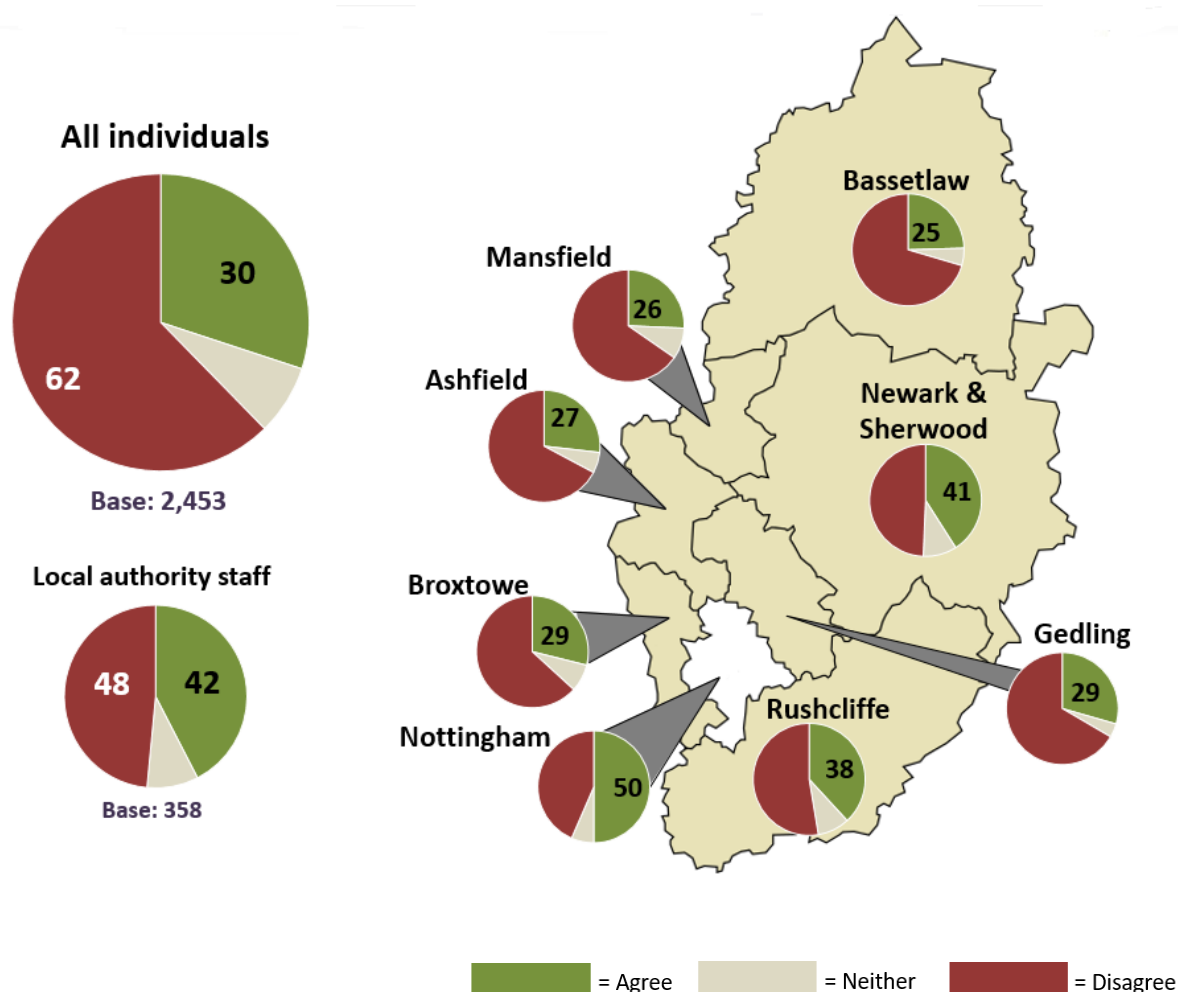
Figure 8: Views on whether there is a case for reducing the number of councils



To what extent do you agree or disagree with the principle of replacing the two-tier system with a unitary council system to run local government across Nottinghamshire?

- ^{2.32} Overall, only three-in-ten individual respondents agreed with the principle of replacing the two-tier system with a unitary system, while more than six-in-ten disagreed. Levels of agreement in Ashfield (27%), Bassetlaw (25%), Broxtowe (29%), Gedling (29%) and Mansfield (26%) were all either in line with, or slightly lower than, the overall. Views in Rushcliffe and Newark and Sherwood were a little more positive, but only 38% and 41% agreed respectively; and local authority staff views were similar: 42% agreed and 48% disagreed.

Figure 9: Views on the principle of replacing the two-tier system with a unitary council system



If you disagree with unitary councils for Nottinghamshire, please think about other possible alternatives (including the status quo), and then use the box below to explain what you think the County Council should consider.

- ^{2.33} In total, 1,350 respondents provided comments. There was significant support for the status quo – 508 respondents stated their support for the current arrangement. There were also 115 comments in favour of increased partnership working (as a means of maintaining the current eight councils while still achieving efficiencies) and smaller numbers discussed possible areas where the existing councils could save money.

2.34 Other alternatives were mentioned by small numbers, the main ones being:

- Abolishing the County Council, and giving more responsibility to the districts/boroughs (135 comments);
- Involving the City Council by expanding its boundaries to take in more of the ‘suburbs’ (e.g. on the basis that many people in bordering areas already use and benefit from facilities in Nottingham) or even entire districts in the south (40 comments);
- Better collaboration with Nottingham City in general (11 comments);
- Other alternatives involving some redrawing of the existing district boundaries (52 comments) – for example, merging them into larger units or making them more equally sized.

2.35 A small number of comments were made in relation to parish councils: either that they should be given greater powers and responsibility (14 comments) or that they should be abolished (11 comments).

2.36 One respondent who supported an enhanced role for the districts/boroughs suggested a central commissioning service to replace the County Council, allowing services like Adult Social Care to continue as county-wide functions.

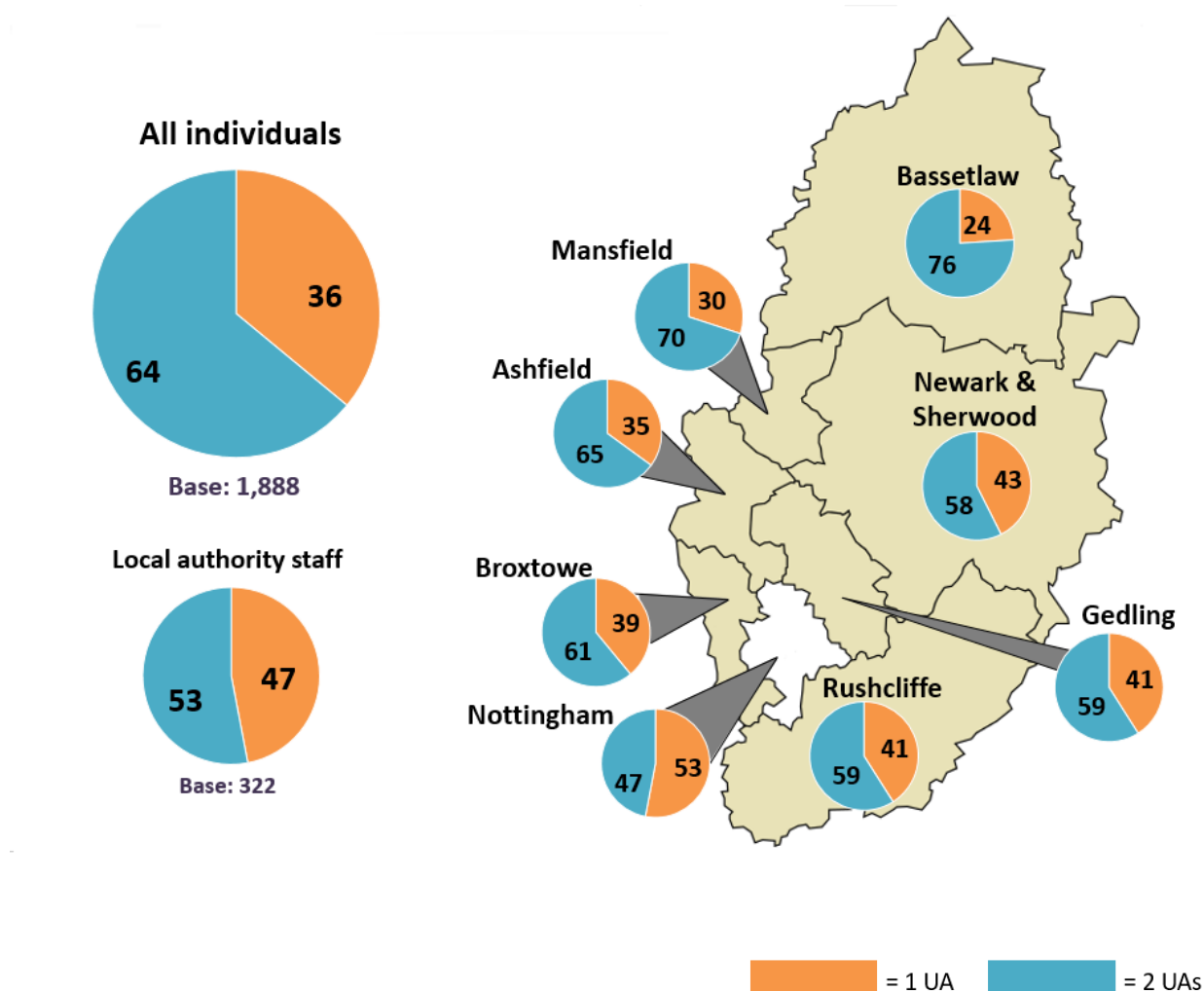
2.37 Some respondents made suggestions that involved joining with areas outside of Nottinghamshire, for example: linking the south of Nottinghamshire with the north of Leicestershire or allowing towns or areas on the county’s periphery to join with (for example) parts of South Yorkshire, Lincolnshire or Leicestershire. A few respondents proposed some level of cross-county sharing of resources (e.g. between Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire) and there were also a few comments around regional working (e.g. suggestions for an East Midlands regional assembly). One respondent commented on the need for any proposal to take account of NHS provision in different areas.

Views on the options

If unitary councils were to be proposed, do you think it would be better for services to be provided by ONE unitary council providing all services for the whole county (excluding Nottingham City Council, which would be unaffected), or by TWO unitary councils providing services for different parts of the county (excluding the City)?

2.38 Overall, there was much more support for two unitary councils than for one (64% favoured two, while 36% favoured one). There was also more support for two in all seven of the districts/boroughs. The views of local authority staff were somewhat more evenly divided: 47% preferred one and 53% preferred two unitary councils.

Figure 10: Support for and opposition to the unitary proposals



If you think two unitary councils would be better, please explain which of the existing district/borough areas you think each unitary council should cover.

914 respondents provided comments, although not all of them addressed the question of which districts/boroughs would be covered by two new unitary authorities. The comments focusing more closely on a preferred configuration have been summarised in the table below. Some sort of north/south split was the most widely suggested, albeit with different combinations of districts and boroughs.

Figure 11: Suggestions for two unitary councils (individuals)

Suggestion		No. of comments
SUGGESTED TWO UNITARY CONFIGURATIONS	NORTH AND SOUTH	
	North/South split (no districts specified)	234
	(i) Ashfield, Bassetlaw, Mansfield, N&S (ii) Broxtowe, Gedling, Rushcliffe	110
	(i) Bassetlaw, Mansfield, N&S (ii) Ashfield, Broxtowe, Gedling and Rushcliffe	42
	(i) Ashfield, Bassetlaw, Mansfield (ii) Broxtowe, Gedling, N&S, Rushcliffe	24
	(i) Bassetlaw, N&S (ii) Mansfield, Ashfield, Gedling, Broxtowe, Rushcliffe	18
	(i) Bassetlaw, N&S, Mansfield, Gedling (ii) Ashfield, Broxtowe, Rushcliffe	2
	With the River Trent as the boundary	7

Suggestion		No. of comments
	EAST AND WEST	
	East/West split (no districts specified)	32
	(i) Bassetlaw, N&S, Rushcliffe (ii) Mansfield, Ashfield, Gedling, Broxtowe	17
	(i) N&S, Gedling, Rushcliffe (ii) Bassetlaw, Mansfield, Ashfield, Broxtowe	14
	(i) Bassetlaw, N&S, Gedling, Rushcliffe (ii) Mansfield, Ashfield, Broxtowe	3
	OTHER 2 UA SUGGESTIONS	
	Urban/rural split	25
	(i) Broxtowe, N&S, Rushcliffe (ii) Bassetlaw, Mansfield, Ashfield, Gedling	5
	(i) Ashfield, Mansfield (ii) Bassetlaw, N&S, Gedling, Broxtowe, Rushcliffe	4
	(i) Gedling, Rushcliffe (ii) Bassetlaw, Mansfield, N&S, Ashfield, Broxtowe	3
	Other specific configurations of districts mentioned fewer times	c.16
OTHER SUGGESTIONS (e.g. supporting a different or unspecified number of unitary councils)	City boundaries should be expanded	38
	Options involving splitting up existing boroughs / districts etc.	90
	Options with different regions outside of Nottinghamshire	14
	Three unitary authorities	12
	Four unitary authorities	6
	Importance of local identity/local needs	32
	Need for an even geographical spread	23
	Local councils/councillors need to make the decision	10

Please give the reasons for your answer to question 11 [i.e. the question about possible number of unitaries and the area they would cover (if there were two)]

2.39 1,272 respondents provided comments, although not all of these comments were related directly to the original question asked. Nonetheless, many respondents did give reasons for preferring either one unitary authority or two. The main reasons provided by those who preferred one unitary council were:

- Cost reasons e.g. saving money and economies of scale (mentioned by 38% of those who preferred one unitary and went on to provide comments);
- Maximising efficiencies (mentioned by 18% of these respondents);
- Reducing duplication (18%);
- Offering more consistency across the area e.g. in terms of service quality, council tax levels, and preventing a 'postcode lottery' (10%);
- Minimising confusion among residents (9%);
- Simplifying services (7%).

2.40 Among those who preferred two unitary councils, there was more focus on the differences between areas of Nottinghamshire, in particular:

- Differences between the north and the south (mentioned by 12% of those who preferred two unitary councils and who went on to provide comments);
- Demographic and socio-economic variations (mentioned by 12% of these respondents);
- Differences in the needs of particular districts or areas (12%).

Other comments were made about:

- The importance of access e.g. face-to-face contact, limiting travel (12%);
- The area being too large to be served by just one council (11%);
- Wishing to avoid 'remote' local government (10%);
- More local democracy and decision-making under two councils (9%).

^{2.41} A small number described two unitary councils as being 'the lesser of two evils' and/or stated that that were opposed to the proposals in general.

Differences by demographic sub-groups

^{2.42} The following charts shows how views on the key questions (the need to make changes, reducing councils, and a unitary system) varied across different demographic subgroups of respondents. For example, looking at the first chart on the need for the councils to make changes: while in general there was a good deal of consistency in views, respondents in the younger age groups showed somewhat higher levels of agreement.

Figure 12: Agreement that the eight councils need to make changes: by demographic sub-group (Base: All individual respondents)

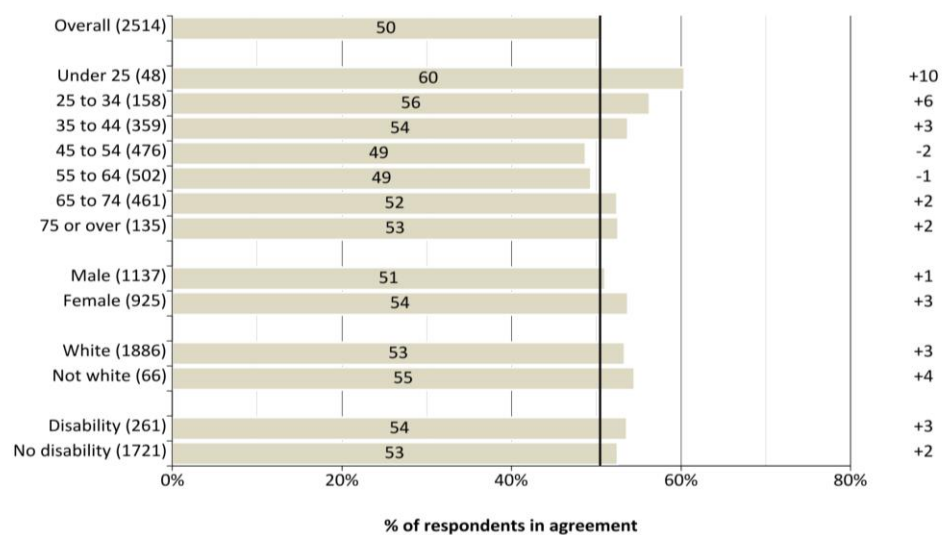


Figure 13: Agreement that there is a case for reducing the number of councils: by demographic sub-group (Base: All individual respondents)

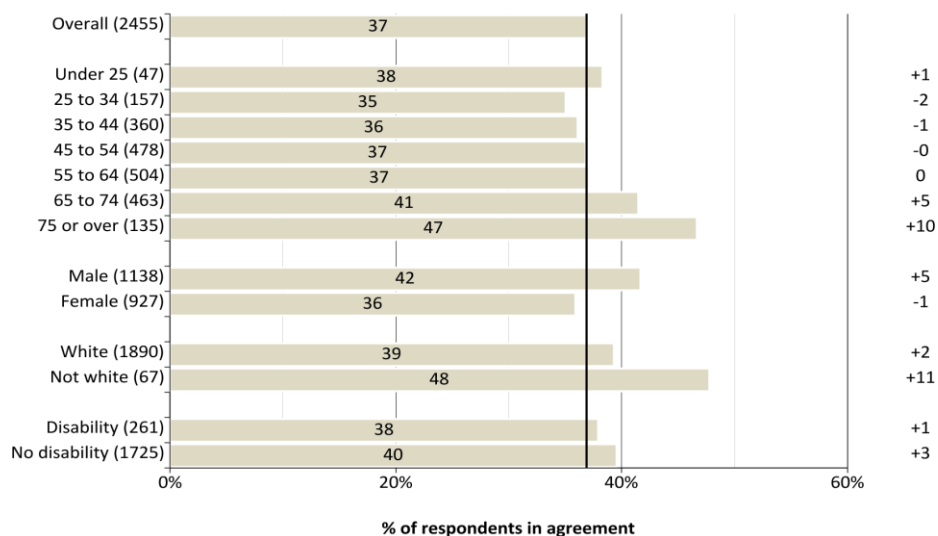


Figure 14: Agreement with replacing two-tier system with unitary councils: by demographic sub-group (Base: All individuals)

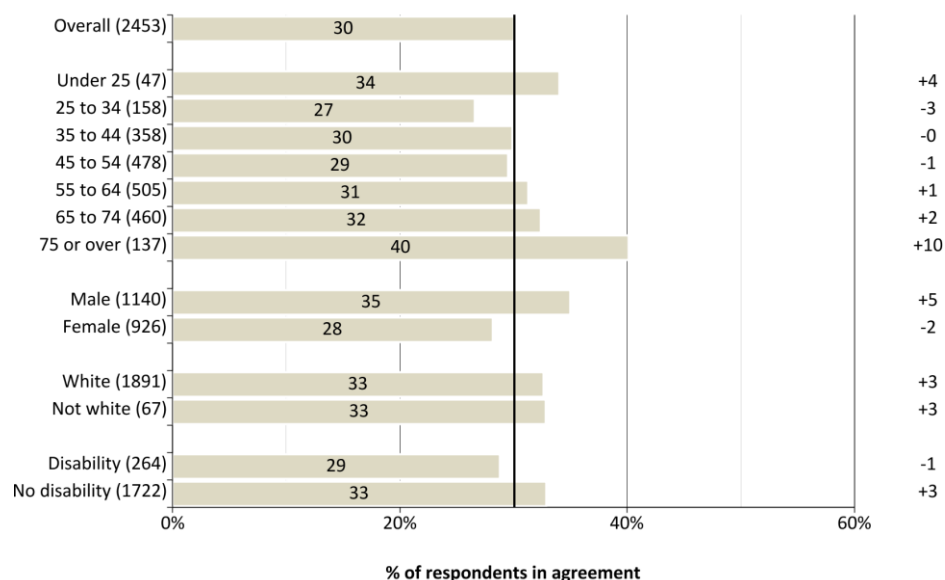


Figure 15: Respondents who would prefer one unitary council: by demographic sub-group (Base: All individual respondents)

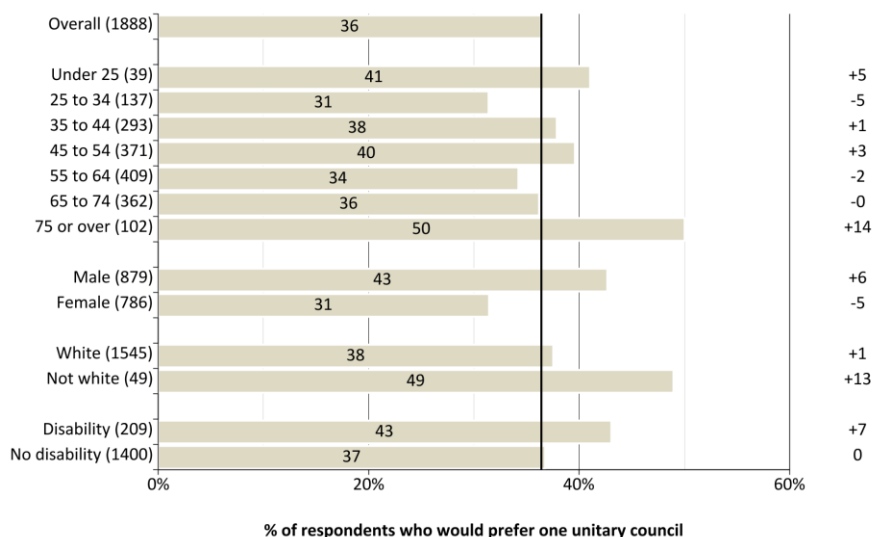
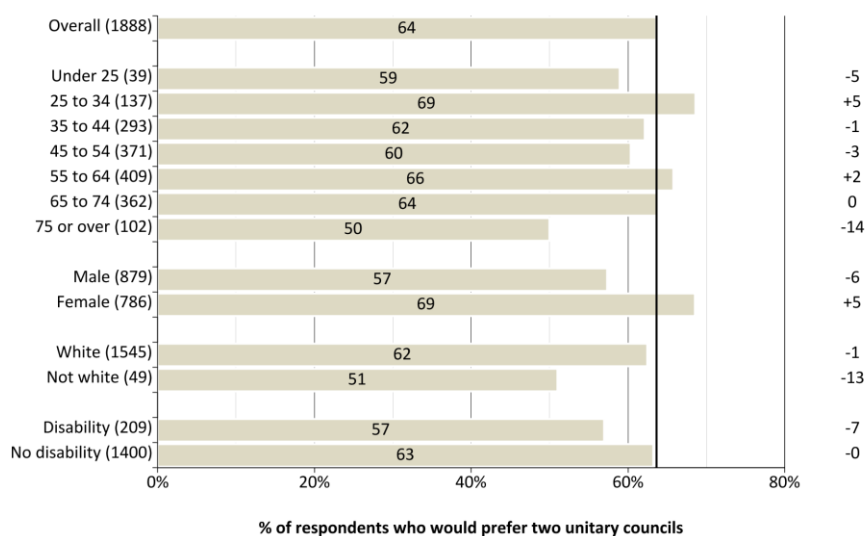


Figure 16: Respondents who would prefer two unitary councils: by demographic sub-group (Base: All individual respondents)

Organisations in the engagement questionnaire

2.43 In total, 22 organisations and their representatives responded to the questionnaire, including; at least half a dozen local businesses, an MEP, 2 parish councils/parish meetings, a social landlord (Nottingham City Homes) and charitable organisations (Nottinghamshire Community Foundation and local representatives of Self Help UK).

2.44 In terms of the initial questions about awareness and feeling informed:

Most organisations (19 out of 21) were aware that there are 8 separate councils providing services across different parts of Nottinghamshire;

Most (16 out of 22) felt informed about which services are provided by their Borough/District Council and which are provided by the County Council; the same number felt informed about how local government takes important decisions affecting them;

Over half (12 out of 22) said that the council's Engagement Document was clear and easy to understand.

2.45 Regarding the possible options for change:

Most (16 out of 22) agreed that the councils need to make changes to respond to the challenges;

Over half (12 out of 22) agreed that there is a case for reducing the number of councils;

Slightly fewer (9 out of 22) agreed with the principle of replacing Nottinghamshire's two-tier system with a unitary council system;

14 of the organisations felt it would be better for services to be provided by two unitary councils, while 4 thought these would be better provided by one unitary council (the remaining 4 did not provide a preference).

2.46 On average, organisations rated value for money (mean score of 9.3 out of 10) as the most important when considering the future structure of local government. This was followed by quality (mean score of 9.2), accountability (9.0), access (7.4) and civic identity (6.9).

- 2.47 Suggestions for any other factors requiring consideration included: governance, the morale of staff, the relationship between the City of Nottingham area and surrounding areas, and for issues to be considered on a local basis.

Other comments by organisations

- 2.48 A small number said that they would prefer to maintain the status quo, although there were supportive comments based on the need to increase efficiencies and etc. Of those who felt two unitary councils would be preferable to one, two suggested a split based on Ashfield, Bassetlaw, Mansfield and Newark and Sherwood (on the one hand) and Broxtowe, Gedling and Rushcliffe on the other. Another suggested the same, but with Ashfield moving into the other unitary. One supported a north/south split without specifying districts; another proposed using the River Trent as the dividing line. There was some support for an enlarged City Council and another unitary council covering more rural areas.
- 2.49 **Self Help UK** felt two unitary authorities split horizontally across the county “*would provide greater synergy with ACS boundaries, and link social care with health provision more appropriately*” (although its overall preference was for a smaller county, with merged districts e.g. Ashfield and Mansfield).
- 2.50 Examples of other comments are provided below:
- *Upgrade the role of Parish Councils.* **Micromix Plant Health Ltd and Evoponic Ltd**
 - *I think the remoteness of County Hall will inevitably lead to the council having to set up satellite operations; so it seems to me to need a removal of some or all of the councillors and use the current facilities in a smaller form as "depots".* **Blyth Marble**
 - *Why does this consultation not ask about removing the county council tier and devolving responsibility for those services to district level - closer to local people, therefore more accessible, more locally responsive and more accountable?* **An MEP**
 - *The County Council should consider the position of the City of Nottingham within the scope of any review, since the part so the conurbation around the City of Nottingham have clear linkages with the City in various ways, including cultural, economic, retail and leisure. This review should not exclude giving serious and detailed consideration to a unitary authority that would cover the Greater Nottingham conurbation and a wider dialogue should be opened up to consider that.* **Nottingham City Homes Group**
 - *A smaller county council with specific countywide strategic responsibility, with more robust and efficient districts would be a preferred option above 2 unitary authorities. This would mean some functions could be held by county, with existing responsibilities for districts being merged together across geographical boundaries. This would make working with the county and districts less complex and more efficient.* **Self Help UK (Nottinghamshire and Nottingham)**

3. Deliberative Engagement

Introduction

- 3.1 This chapter reports a range of deliberative meetings with members of the public, business people, the voluntary sector, and town and parish councillors drawn from across Nottinghamshire, along with telephone interviews with key stakeholders. Each section below details the meetings held with different groups, but in summary the programme included:
- Three focus groups with randomly selected members of the public
 - One focus group with business people and one with representatives of the voluntary sector
 - A forum with parish and town councils (with a total of 71 participants)
 - Telephone interviews with seven key stakeholders from higher and further education, the Local enterprise Partnership (LEP), a Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), the Police and Crime Commissioner and another cross-county organisation.
- 3.2 There were also five written submissions, including from the Police and Crime Commissioner, a county-wide organisation, a voluntary sector action group, and three Parish and Town Councils.
- 3.3 The meetings were facilitated independently by ORS with no council officers or members present. Each session began with an ORS presentation (to ensure that standardised information was provided to each one) outlining the current two-tier system, the possible case for change, and the nature of, and precedents for, a unitary structure. It was made clear that Nottingham City was excluded from consideration because it is already a unitary.
- 3.4 It was emphasised that this is early engagement and no proposals are on the table at present. Participants were encouraged to ask questions throughout and the meetings were thorough and thoughtful in listening to and responding openly to a wide range of evidence and issues. The County Council Chief Executive introduced the business, voluntary sector and Parish and Town Councillors meetings briefly before leaving the main session to be run by ORS alone.
- 3.5 Before the explanatory presentation and discussions, the members of the public were asked briefly about their:
- Awareness of Nottinghamshire's current local government structure
 - Initial (or immediate) views on whether (not counting parish and town councils) the number of Nottinghamshire councils should be reduced significantly?
- 3.6 The point of the questions was to indicate residents' 'ordinary understanding' of local government structures, while also allowing a comparison between their 'immediate, off-the-cuff' impressions with their more considered judgements following two hours or more of discussions.

Key points from the deliberative engagement

3.7 There is a good deal of support for a unitary structure – including:

More than half of the representatives of Parish and Town Councils

Almost half of those who expressed a view in the public focus groups

The great majority of the business community

Two-thirds of the key stakeholders interviewed who expressed an opinion

About half of the small number of submissions.

3.8 Importantly, many of those who did not express a view wanted more information before deciding – including 14 Parish and Town Council representatives, six out of nine voluntary sector representatives and ten of 34 in the public focus groups.

3.9 There is a willingness to listen. Most stakeholders (meaning all involved in the engagement process from the public to businesses, the voluntary sector, Parish and Town Councils and key organisations) are relatively open-minded about the structure of local government. They may see benefits in the existing two-tier structure, but do not object to a unitary structure in principle – as long there are benefits. They want decent services, local accountability, good joint working between statutory agencies and others, and an environment within which business, the voluntary sector and academia can thrive.

3.10 There were clear messages about what is needed to present a fair and reasoned case to stakeholders if there is formal consultation on any proposals – including all the following:

Services and functions and quality are more important than delivery structure.

Stakeholders need more information: They need to see a business case that includes: a cost benefit analysis, particularly the savings and transformation costs; reasons for the 300,000-population threshold, and; evidence of how well other unitary authorities are working, particularly for cost savings, quality of service delivery and maintaining localism (local accountability and service delivery). The comparators should be relevant to Nottinghamshire.

Local accountability needs to be preserved; mitigations are needed to avoid inaccessibility and a remote bureaucracy with domination by an urban centre. One possible solution was suggested several times across the engagement – namely area boards.

Stakeholders saw a need for communication with the City and Districts. Some stakeholders felt that the review of structures would be strengthened by the support of the district and borough councils; indeed, some suggested the process would not work without being a joint enterprise.

Some stakeholders and members of the public were concerned that the review should take the expansion needs of the City into account. When considering unitary structures, some participants questioned the logic of omitting the City from the possible restructuring, irrespective of it already being a UA.

People wanted to be sure that talents would be pooled so that District expertise was not lost. Concern was expressed about the importance of local knowledge for service delivery, especially in planning for health, housing, social care, education and economic development. Hospital discharge management and educational support for children were mentioned particularly.

Some people feared that funding for district services might suffer in a unitary structure, given the financial pressures on social services.

The future roles of Parish and Town Councils should be explained in the context of local services and accountability under a unitary structure, including what funding would be available and other details. Some want a commitment that current supportive arrangements will be continued and reassurances that about the risk of double taxation for some areas.

Three focus groups with members of the public

Introduction

- 3.11 Three two-hour deliberative focus groups were held with a total of 34 randomly selected Nottinghamshire residents to discuss the possible reorganisation of local government in the County. The schedule of meetings and attendance levels were as shown below.

WORKSHOP LOCATION	DATE	NUMBER OF ATTENDEES
Bassetlaw (Retford)	22nd October 2018	12
Gedling (Carlton)	24th October 2018	11
Ashfield and Mansfield (Mansfield)	25th October 2018	11

Main Findings

Awareness of current local government structures

- 3.12 Some participants in all three workshops were relatively well informed about the structure of their local government, since they knew that there are eight councils in Nottinghamshire (excluding Nottingham City, which is already unitary, and not counting parish and town councils); but there was a wide range of incorrect estimates by those who were less aware (from two to 18 councils), with many not even wanting to hazard a guess.
- 3.13 Most were also aware that, although they pay their council tax to their boroughs or districts, it is Nottinghamshire County Council that spends most of the money raised. While they knew this in general terms, many (perhaps most) were unaware that more than three-quarters of their council tax is spent by the County Council. However, while many people were aware that adult and children's social services, and education, are costly services to run, few were aware of just how costly they are. Overall, people were not very aware of how important the County Council is in their local lives.
- 3.14 Following the initial awareness questions, the presentation explained the current two-tier structure and the proposal for change in Northamptonshire, to ensure that everyone had a common level of understanding as the basis for the detailed discussions. There was considerable interest in these issues and people had no difficulty in understanding both the background and nature of the proposal.

Awareness of the 'case for change'

- 3.15 Many participants were aware of some of the factors leading the County Council to consider the reorganisation of local government, though awareness levels varied. Similarly, some, but not all, were aware that the County Council is considering possible options for unitary structures across the county.

However, none of the participants had assessed the possible options for change or felt they had all the information to do that.

Criteria for assessing local government structures

- 3.16 The forums were asked to score the relative importance of five potential criteria in guiding potential local government reorganisation. In the scoring, 0 indicated very low importance, while 10 meant 'extremely important'. The primary purpose of this exercise was to indicate residents' priorities; but the criteria scores also indicate the background assumptions guiding residents' judgements on the proposals for two new unitary.
- 3.17 Of the five criteria, the most important in the **Gedling** focus group were:
- Accountability and Quality (joint top ranking)
 - Some way behind came Value for money
 - Rather a long way behind came Access and Civic Identity
- 3.18 In **Mansfield and Ashfield** the most important was:
- Value for money
 - A little way behind came Quality and Accountability.
 - Further behind came Access
 - A long way behind came Civic identity.
- 3.19 While in **Bassetlaw** the priorities were:
- Accountability and Value for money
 - A little way behind came Quality
 - Further behind came Civic identity and Access.
- 3.20 There was considerable general consistency in the each of the groups, but there was a small number who rated Access and Civic Identity as the most important criteria.
- 3.21 Overall, the three groups were consistent, with Accountability, Quality and Value for money being the more important criteria, with Access and Civic identity as less important. Nevertheless, all the criteria were considered important. Overall, though, it seems that people want accountable local government to deliver value for money (which is not necessarily 'cheapness') through excellence and efficiency.
- 3.22 It is perhaps surprising that 'civic identity' was one of the lowest-rated of the criteria. While the forums' discussions about unitary councils often showed people's attachment to their district/borough councils, the criteria scores demonstrate that in general councils do not have to be immediately 'local' to meet citizens' more important expectations for accountability, quality and value for money.
- 3.23 Some people did not want their rankings to be misunderstood; for example, one person said:
- If I support Accountability highly, that doesn't mean I support UAs – I want local accountability through the districts! (Gedling)*

Initial and final opinions

- 3.24 Before any of the explanatory presentation, participants in the workshops were asked for their initial or immediate views on whether the number of councils (not counting Nottingham City and parish and town councils) in Nottinghamshire should be reduced substantially (but by an unspecified number). It is striking

that, initially, in most meetings, substantial proportions of the participants favoured simplifying local government in Nottinghamshire by reducing the number of councils.

- 3.25 Much later in the meetings, following detailed discussions, the forums were asked specifically if the eight existing two-tier councils should be abolished and replaced with two unitary authorities. (They were also told that they should not feel ‘bound’ by their initial views, which were only indicative.) People’s initial reactions and their final judgements are summarised in the table below. For the sake of simplicity, the table shows the number of workshop participants who favoured change at different stages of the meetings as a proportion of all those who responded, excluding ‘don’t knows’ and those unable to decide without more information.

AREA	INITIAL VIEWS Proportion favouring reducing number of councils	FINAL JUDGEMENTS Proportion favouring new Unitary Councils
Bassetlaw (Retford)	2/12	1/10
Gedling (Carlton)	6/9	9/10
Ashfield and Mansfield (Mansfield)	4/7	2/5
All-Nottinghamshire aggregated	12/28 (43%)	12/25 (48%)

- 3.26 The initial opinions demonstrate that many people are not wedded to the continuation of the current structures: in many cases, unprompted and without the presentation of any evidence, the participants inclined towards the simplification of local government. For example, in Gedling, the initial views showed a majority for reducing the number of councils.
- 3.27 Following the presentation and detailed discussions, 12 respondents out of 25 (48%) were in favour of abolishing the two-tier system and creating a unitary structure of some kind. However, there were considerable differences between the three areas. In Gedling, 9/10 favoured a unitary structure, while in Mansfield 2/5 were in favour and in Bassetlaw only 1/10. It is important to note that many participants across the three focus groups made it clear that they were voting for a proposal to be brought forward that would provide more information on which to make an informed judgement. At the same time, seven participants stated that they could not decide without having more information.

One or two unitaries?

- 3.28 No clear consensus emerged about whether one or two unitaries would be best. In the Bassetlaw group, two people preferred a single unitary, with four preferring two. In Gedling, opinion was divided equally, with five for each option. Opinions were not fully expressed in the Mansfield group: five preferred a single unitary, but it was not clear how many of the remainder preferred two or were ‘don’t knows’. In total the countable preferences were:

One unitary: 12 out of 21 expressing an opinion

Two unitaries: 9 out of 21 expressing an opinion

- 3.29 The main reasons against a single unitary council were that local representation and local knowledge are needed. The main reasons for favouring a single unitary were simplicity, consistency and cross-subsidising services across the county by balancing deprived with affluent areas. The main reasons for choosing two

unitary councils were local accountability, service delivery, and bringing together areas with common interests, such as old mining areas.

The geographic division into two unitaries

- 3.30 In Gedling there was support for a West-East divide rather than North-South; but there were variations on the exact lines of any split. In Bassetlaw a North-South split was marginally favoured, but some wanted a western UA with half of Bassetlaw included (ie Worksop). Two questions were raised:

Why it was only possible to split the County using existing local authority boundaries, (raised particularly in Bassetlaw),

Why is Nottingham City not included in the review? Some felt it should be considered in any overall settlement within the county.

Concerns expressed about moving to a unitary structure

- 3.31 The main concerns (which were not necessarily objections) in all three workshops were:

There was some scepticism whether introducing a unitary structure would save money rather than create uncertainty and instability. (Some people assumed that ‘the choice’ was between a stable and continuing status quo on the one hand, and an uncertain UA making savings on the other.):

You get efficiencies of scale. So it's cheaper at first, but then it gets less efficient because you lose that local knowledge of - which families in a school need support. As it gets less efficient then you will get consultancies being hired. (Bassetlaw)

One group is going to do what two groups were doing. Generally, what happens is that one group becomes twice as big to do the work. If that happens you save nothing. (Ashfield and Mansfield)

Any savings would be made through cuts which could impact on services. It will be the people down the ladder who will take on extra jobs for no extra money. It will be very inefficient. The public will have to wait longer for services and get worse services. (Bassetlaw)

It was also felt that the savings were relatively small in the context of total local authority budget.

People wanted to see evidence that UAs created elsewhere ‘are working well and saving money successfully’:

Do you know how the Scottish ones are working and how long they have been unitary? (Ashfield and Mansfield)

In Gedling there was a feeling that there are too many councillors now. In Ashfield and Mansfield: There was concern about how many premises/offices might be closed and sold – particularly since:

They would need to keep a lot of the buildings because they just moved all the DWPs, some police and other services into the council offices. (Ashfield and Mansfield)

In Bassetlaw, fear was expressed that moving to unitary status is associated with cuts and privatisation, particularly when the move is driven by a *Tory-run* Nottinghamshire County Council.

Local politics

- 3.32 One of the participants in the Ashfield and Mansfield workshop disclosed that s/he would be standing as a councillor (at the next election). Partly because of the council candidate's insights, this group discussed the political implications and the most appropriate division of the county should UAs be introduced – and a clear difference emerged between the political and residents' perspectives. The candidate believed strongly that a W-E division was by far the most appropriate and declared that:

Bassetlaw, Ashfield and Mansfield are already in discussions about merging in their own structure, and Broxtowe could join them.

- 3.33 The political basis for a West-East division of the county was understood, but other members of the group felt that such a division would create two councils that were each dominated by a single party; and that the western UA would be relatively impoverished in having a low council tax base and high social needs. In effect, the candidate felt that was a price worth paying for an appropriate political divide. More generally, the candidate was sure that:

Nottingham City will make its own proposal if the County goes ahead; it will have plans for expansion and mergers too; everyone will be against the County's proposal!

More information

- 3.34 Finally, it should be noted that some people in Bassetlaw and in Ashfield and Mansfield could neither support nor oppose moving to unitary structure because they wanted more information on which to base their decision:

You can't ask us because we've got to know the detail. Develop a proposal, sell it to us then we can decide. (Gedling)

Business Community

Introduction

- 3.35 Diverse business people from the Chamber of Commerce, the Federation of Small Businesses, The Mansfield Business Improvement District and others were invited to a business breakfast workshop, and 12 attended (half women, half men).

Main Findings

General

- 3.36 Business people's general concerns were that any new system should be 'effective and sustainable' – that it should 'work well for residents'. Reorganisation would reduce the number of local councils, so it is important for new unitary authorities to demonstrate localism, with convincing area-based operations for planning (including development control) and other functions.

Criteria for assessing local government structures

- 3.37 Value for money and efficiency are important for businesses, but when discussing local government, they are not the only considerations. While local civic identity is not a primary concern to prohibit a move to unitary status, business people are concerned that local communities' interests are not 'lost' within a big bureaucracy:

What we all want is for local government to be efficient, accountable and to give value for money. It's a no brainer if it saves money.

I'm a bit concerned that what we have talked about this morning is money. People don't seem to come into it. After place making etc over the previous few years there are lots of little groups trying to do their best for the local community. Local plans. Has that been a waste of time and money? Who decides what is best for local communities? This seems bad for local/community decision making

Balance of opinion

3.38 The points above were priorities, not objections to unitaries in principle. In fact, there was overwhelming support for the introduction of a unitary structure and for a single, county-wide UA.

3.39 Those in favour of unitary local government outnumbered those wishing to retain the status quo by nine to two, with one requiring more information. One comment that was widely endorsed was:

If this were a business under financial pressure, it would make no sense at to have 8 CEOs doing similar functions within a radius of say 50 miles! That unnecessary bureaucracy should be stripped out.

3.40 There was a large majority for a single UA rather than two – by a majority of 11 to 1.

3.41 There was no overall consensus on how the county might be divided if there were two unitaries, but the important point for business is that the structure works fairly and efficiently:

If you're worried about the split – more and less affluent; the City has more and less affluent areas now. You have to take what you've got and make sure those who need it get services. Any split should be North-South. The north never gets a fair bite of the cherry - the City is too far away.

Other options

3.42 One radically different approach was suggested by one person, namely combining with other East Midlands authorities:

We are a poor relation compared to urban areas like Manchester/west Midlands. In situations like this ... it calls for pragmatism not politics. Putting political areas together gives you a stronger voice. We suffer from not having that.

A combined authority, perhaps with a Mayor, like in Greater Manchester and the West Midlands, removes much of the duplication – why not go down that route?

More information and consultation

3.43 In general, businesses called for more information:

Some of us have asked for additional information – it is important that we do get this to check our assumptions and current view.

3.44 A request was made for evidence of the benefits of moving to unitary status:

The authorities who have recently moved to unitary system – is there any evidence of the benefits – any data?

3.45 Those present agreed that it is a priority in any possible future consultation on specific proposals for the representative organisations to have time to consult their members. In this context the Chief Executive of the East Midlands Chamber offered to facilitate and organise meetings through the Nottinghamshire Business Forum. It was suggested that one in the north and one in the south of Nottinghamshire would be sufficient.

- 3.46 Only one representative asked a question which demonstrated a concern about getting the districts and boroughs on board:

The local authorities in Nottinghamshire are diverse. Do they all support this?

Voluntary Sector

Introduction

- 3.47 Representatives from nine voluntary sector organisations attended a forum, including Councils for Voluntary Services, Citizens Advice Bureaux, and Community and Voluntary Action groups working with a range of clients. The representatives came from across Nottinghamshire.

Main Findings

General

- 3.48 The main concerns (which were not necessarily objections) of the voluntary sector representatives were to ensure that voluntary sector services would be funded and supported under a unitary structure to be able to meet the needs of their clients. Concerns relating to how the voluntary sector would work under a unitary structure included:

Funding under the new structure, since they get most funding from, and have closer relations with, the districts, even if it is shorter-term funding than from the County Council.

Loss of close working relationships with local district officers/councillors.

Citizens Advice is a district/borough organisation. We work closely with district councils and departments such as housing. We have a close relationship with officers and councillors.

We work locally ... and really value the financial and other contributions from the district council. I worry about the loss of that local knowledge.

Local access; many voluntary organisations' clients need local access to services

Clients won't be able to access services locally, they'll need to travel. We need to have local access; if there was change Citizens Advice would have to change and there may be a less good service initially.

- 3.49 One person added that the CAB could look at other ways to deliver services, such as through smart phone technology, but that some of their clients require local face to face access.

- 3.50 General concerns about moving to a unitary structure included:

A loss of local democracy. District councillors are considered by some to be more 'invested in their local areas' than the more remote county councillors:

There is a perception of local councillors being ... more invested, in the local area.

District councillors have more of a part time role, County Councillors more of a full time professional role; professional, retired, landowners etc who do not need to work – not the sort of people who would represent our clients.

A danger that unitary authorities would focus too much on cost savings:

If it's fit for purpose it's great, but a danger of focussing too much on cost savings and loss of locality.

- 3.51 However, some could see the benefits arising from districts currently working together:

Having seen how Ashfield & Mansfield work well together it could work, but there can be a loss of access to services. There's a possibility of needing new buildings; reducing savings. If it works well it could be a good thing, but I have yet to see any reorganisation that is well planned and well executed.

Balance of opinion

- 3.52 Despite the concerns, there was overall acceptance and some support for a unitary structure in principle:

Six were in 'equipoise', saying that a single-tier is fine *as long as it works (for our clients)*;

One person could accept a unitary structure *if it worked*, but was sceptical that it would;

Two did not know but could accept a unitary structure.

... as long as it works for our clients; then I'm happy to accept either.

- 3.53 Of the four who expressed an opinion, two preferred a single unitary and two were undecided, one of whom summarised the discussion:

One would make more sense for distribution of funds; two would make more sense by putting similar areas together, but if it's two, then CT funding would be a problem.

- 3.54 Some listed factors to be considered in deciding any split, notably taking account of health boundaries and travel to work areas:

Consider Health; CCGs. When the boundaries are not co-terminus then it can be very difficult to work across organisations. For instance, there is a disconnect in Bassetlaw between care from County Hall and a different Health area.

If there were one or two, would you still have local delivery areas, or would they be pulled into parts of the county?

Look at travel to work and services. People in Bassetlaw look to services in Lincolnshire.

Other options

- 3.55 Though it was made clear that Nottingham City was excluded, one felt the review should include the City:

If it were to move it should be two; Nottingham and the South (Gedling & Rushcliffe), and the North.

Local politics

- 3.56 Three observations were made on the political aspects of putting together any proposal.

Some asked about the districts' and boroughs' involvement in the process:

What's the feeling from the district and borough councils? Have you done anything like this {workshop} with the leaders/chief executives?

One observed that some districts already have shared services. This could mean they would be compatible within the same unitary:

Ashfield & Mansfield have moved down this route. They share a lot of services well; as do Rushcliffe & Gedling and Bassetlaw & Newark.

There was a suspicion that the process is driven more by Whitehall than by local councils:

By virtue of the fact that the Government are driving costs down, means they [the government] are driving it and that's quite insidious.

Parish and Town Councils

Introduction

- 3.57 All Parish and Town Councils were invited to send representatives to a forum and 71 Parish and Town Councillors from across Nottinghamshire attended, in some cases with more than one representative from the same Parish or Town Council. The forum took place in a constructive atmosphere which supported an open discussion.

Main Findings

General

- 3.58 There were criticisms of the time allowed for the engagement and complaints that they had not had time to consult their councils in formal meetings. Many wanted more information before coming to a decision, including evidence that unitaries had worked in other places. The importance that Parish and Town Councillors place on having full information was clearly demonstrated by a supporter of unitaries:

I passionately support unitaries, but at the minute I'd support the status quo until the full evidence is presented.

- 3.59 Some suggested that all local councils should be involved in the process:

The whole process is flawed if the starting point does not include the City Council.

Concerned that it appears (that the) county is setting the agenda, the districts scrabbling to present their response. It should be a collaborative approach.

Criteria for assessing local government structures

- 3.60 After all the discussions, the forum was asked to score the relative importance of five potential criteria for local government reorganisation. The results of the 55 responses are shown in the table below in order of priority.

CRITERIA	OVERALL AVERAGE SCORE	RANK ¹
Quality	9.3	1
Value for Money	9.2	2
Accountability	8.7	3
Access	8.4	4
Civic Identity	6.7	5

- 3.61 For Parish and Town Councillors:

Quality and Value for Money are the top priorities

Accountability and then Access are ranked as the next priorities, a little way behind the first two;

Civic Identity comes some way behind the others as a priority.

¹ Overall average score and rank are based on the scores awarded by all responding Town and Parish Councillors

- 3.62 The importance of value for money was stressed:

Value for money has got to be the priority, as without savings we cannot provide services that are critical to residents' wellbeing and safety.

- 3.63 Views were expressed on what is meant by 'quality' and 'value for money':

Economy of scale does not necessarily guarantee quality – on the contrary.

Value is not just defined by cost! You need to value people – volunteers are cheap but immensely valuable. Good Governance is costly. It costs time effort and money. Value historic and working structures.

Balance of opinion

- 3.64 More than half of all the Parish and Town Councillors were in favour of a unitary structure in principle. Many of those who did not expressly support the idea wanted more information before making up their minds. The balance of opinion was:

In favour of considering unitary status: 36

Against: 14

Unable to express a view without having more information: 14

- 3.65 Others needed to consult their parishioners before expressing a view:

You haven't given us the chance to consult our parishioners – haven't given us the time for that.

- 3.66 One made a point which others supported:

I voted to try the system, but that doesn't mean I will support the final proposal.

- 3.67 Other supporters were more definite:

I feel I've come here and all I've heard are negatives surely there are some positives – a new vibrant authority that's had some thinking about it. We should be positive about it and improve services.

- 3.68 There was a wide-ranging discussion about whether one or two unitaries is preferable. Expressions of opinion were about equally divided. The main points raised in the discussion are presented below (when discussing the possible geographic split in the county).

The geographic division into two unitaries

- 3.69 A few wanted Nottingham City to be the core of a southern unitary authority, but the structure of that potential authority was not clear: it could include:

Three southern districts

Gedling alone (or most of it)

Parts of all three southern districts

- 3.70 The case for including Nottingham City was expressed by one participant:

Nottingham is one of the top cities in the country. It should expand its boundaries to provide economic lead. The remaining county should be a single unitary. City to expand about 3 miles – most of Broxtowe, most of Gedling and some of Rushcliffe.

- 3.71 Others from the rural areas disagreed, saying strongly that involving the City in an otherwise rural unitary structure would not be beneficial to rural areas:

One unitary – I don't think Nottingham City has anything to give to the other councils.

I don't see that a City council should be trying to manage rural areas -they have different priorities. I would feel better with other rural areas.

Other options

- 3.72 A few people suggested that existing councils could develop more shared services to generate savings:

There are also savings which can be made without going to unitaries – eg sharing services.

Concerns about moving to a unitary structure

- 3.73 Some stressed the risks of change and reorganisation:

I'm sceptical of an uplift in quality unless services adequately resourced.

Often the cost savings are used to justify restructuring – but they are rarely delivered (eg bigger new SMT, sub-regional planning boards).

- 3.74 There were also some concerns about the possible loss of localism, local accountability, and poorer services – particularly for the North and rural areas of the County. It was considered important to retain local services, particularly for older and vulnerable people, and to retain local knowledge:

Not everybody uses the internet. Service provision needs to be local to be accessible, in particular to those who do not drive.

Residents need local amenities, particularly for the increasing level of older residents.

Important that things like planning are done by people with local knowledge.

- 3.75 Again, positive views were expressed about the benefits of a unitary:

A unitary will allow standardisation of currently very different services – for example, recycling.

More information

- 3.76 Many wanted more information before, as described clearly by one councillor:

We need a proper business case with costs and benefits both for the evaluation and possible implementation.

- 3.77 Some stressed the need for evidence of the success of other unitaries:

I'd like to come back to the proof that the other new unitary authorities are working more efficiently. From talking to authorities over the Country I'm not sure that's the case.

Getting the process right for Parish and Town Councils

- 3.78 Parish and Town Councils need time to work through their own democratic processes:

If this is important, why have parish councils not been given time to have discussions? This is short – parish councils meet usually about once every 6 weeks.

I don't think I could make a decision without discussing it within our parish council. What right have we got to make a decision which will make people unemployed?

- 3.79 One participant made a plea for the role of Parish and Town Councils to be thought through in any proposal:

I'm not convinced that you have stood in the shoes of PTC councillors and what we need or where we're coming from or have any substantive answers to what our role would be and the implications for us.

Telephone interviews with key stakeholders

Introduction

- 3.80 To get more insight about opinions of the proposal, ORS interviewed seven key stakeholders by phone, including three further and higher education establishments, the Police and Crime Commissioner, Bassetlaw CCG, the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and another county-wide organisation.

County-wide organisation

General

- 3.81 The respondent has a positive impression of the listening and engagement programme:

I have been well briefed by the County Council CEO and have received documents and completed the questionnaire – so there have been several good opportunities to be involved.

- 3.82 The interviewee felt that the County Council performs relatively well in difficult circumstances. It is not 'high-performing' because it is struggling with funding issues and a national investigation into abuse cases; but overall it is continuing to manage. The respondent has good relations with the County Council senior officers.

Main opinions

- 3.83 There is an urgent need for change to introduce a single-tier of local government and a single unitary authority would be best. The County Council should continue to assess the options and go forward to proposals and formal consultation – and in doing so it should:

Give clear leadership by indicating its preferred option – that is, it should not appear undecided or ambiguous in its thinking (and so make consultation an implicit referendum)

Reasons for a single unitary

- 3.84 Co-operation between pan-county organisations is more integrated and effective within an all-county single-tier structure:

Currently, the districts are diverse and varying partners – so joint working across the county needs district-by-district customisation based on differences of policy, outlook and politics (rather than residents' needs).

- 3.85 There big divides in the county – including:

North-South differences in heritage, culture and politics

- 3.86 But even more so there are entrenched:

West-East political divides (west is labour; east is conservative)

- 3.87 A North-South split would be distinctly unpopular with political leaders across the districts. A West-East split would be much more politically acceptable because it would reflect the aspirations of local political leaders and create two 'harmonious' unitary authorities. A single UA – though much the best solution in terms of service delivery and financial viability – might have difficulty in:

*Achieving effective political majorities or working arrangements between the different parties
The East of the County would be fearful that it was 'subsidising' the poorer West.*

- 3.88 The interviewee has a strong preference for a single UA, but politics as the 'art of the possible' – which might mean that a two-unitary structure would be more acceptable and work more readily in practice.

Criteria

- 3.89 Of the five criteria, the most important are Value for Money (a balance of excellence and economy) and Access – they put people at the heart of the service focus

Civic identity is not important – it has little impact on services

One value/criteria that should be included is Leadership: The CC should show leadership in putting forward its favoured option clearly.

City of Nottingham

- 3.90 Arnold and Carlton should become part of the City.

Police and Crime Commissioner

General

- 3.91 The P&CC felt that there is a need for change, but the County Council Leader has been ‘too top-down’ – though *she need to ‘fire the gun’ to get things moving*. In any case, it would have been hard and slow to mobilise a consensus with districts.
- 3.92 The County Council runs its services fairly well, but there is a tendency to over-state achievements – when the standards is ‘mediocre to good’, without being outstanding. The Safer Nottinghamshire Board works ‘quite well’, but there has been some fragmentation because the community partnerships are built on a district-unit basis. The main issue overall is that budgets have/are reducing substantially (the interviewee stated this was by 25% for the police and 40% for the County Council) – so there is a need to share/pool budgets more effectively. Community health services are very fragmented.
- 3.93 The expansion of the city is needed – but how?
The City Council is making overtures towards Gedling but does not want to include the conservative parts!

Main opinions

- 3.94 There is an urgent need for change to introduce a single-tier of local government. The Commissioner has a strong preference for two unitary authorities – on a North-South axis, with the north understood as Ashfield, Bassetlaw, Mansfield, and Newark and Sherwood.

Reasons

- 3.95 There is enormous duplication of work and effort across the seven districts that could be streamlined. Police Neighbourhood Inspectors are aligned on borough/district boundaries. Many policing teams are based and co-located in borough/district premises. A two-UA structure can work because:
- The population base is big enough
 - There are currently three community safety partnerships
 - The County is too big for one unitary authority
 - Community health and social services can work effectively in two authorities.

Risks/mitigations

- 3.96 The southern parts of Rushcliffe look towards Leicestershire while the north in Bassetlaw looks towards Sheffield – so there are big North-South differences that would have to be recognised and accommodated properly.

Criteria

- 3.97 Of the five criteria, the most important is Value for Money; Civic Identity and local traditions are much less important.

Senior university and further education academics

General

- 3.98 All the academics talked about working well with the Leader and CEO of both the County and City. There was considerable caution about progressing change too quickly because:

There is a need to achieve a consensus in local government by collaborating (especially with the City)

Mergers are never as quick and financially beneficial as initially expected

It would be useful to have evidence of the benefits of restructuring before making a decision.

Brexit means there is considerable political and financial uncertainty.

- 3.99 The boroughs and districts have considerable knowledge of housing, education and skills (including employer-higher education links), inward investment, and economic regeneration issues in their local areas – and this expertise must not be lost in reorganisation. Any new authority should avoid being too city/urban-centric and losing expertise from the further parts of Nottinghamshire.

Main opinions

- 3.100 Some academics were unwilling to draw their establishments into what they see as a political discussion. Some were able to speak for their establishments, with one supporting fewer councils (though it was not quite clear if that implies a unitary structure) and one against changing the current structure:

We are supportive of lowering the number of councils. Planning for example should be brought together.

We should retain the current structure unchanged.

It's not helpful for [this establishment] to come down on one side or another on this.

- 3.101 There may be potential for some of the district councils to work together.

- 3.102 Some thought that in principle:

A single, all-county UA would be better than two (often because they questioned the long-term economic viability of a rural northern UA).

- 3.103 Others said that, from a 'theoretical point of view' it would seem best to divide the whole of Nottinghamshire into two UAs, with the southern one based on and around the City. They felt that the City should encompass some/much of its surrounding urban fringes (and possibly Rushcliffe and other districts), alongside the second, rural UA.

Bassetlaw CCG

General

- 3.104 The County Council does a good job within the constraints of national funding pressures, and the CCG and County Council work well on adult and children's social care. The CCG also works with the district-level authorities – for example, on:

Hospital discharges and getting people back into their homes

Housing and new developments

Homelessness

Substance abuse and dependency

General public health and wellbeing – especially integrated preventative approaches via open spaces, cycling, limiting the clustering of fast food outlets.

- 3.105 The CCG collaborates with Bassetlaw district closely on all those matters, and benefits from its local knowledge in relation to public health issues. Bassetlaw is remote from the rest of the county, and the CCG is part of NHS North/South Yorkshire rather than the Midlands; so residents turn towards Sheffield and Doncaster for hospital care, shopping and travel to work.

Main opinions

- 3.106 While not an enthusiast for change, the interviewee understood that streamlining local government through UAs was in principle ‘a good thing’; but they were concerned about the loss of truly local working that benefits from local knowledge, expertise and access. Health services were said to ‘rely on local authorities’ knowledge and expertise’, and this will be even more important in the context of more integrated and prevention-based approaches. A single UA centralised far away could cause the CCG problems – so the preference was for two UAs while recognising that contiguous districts often have different kinds of populations and issues.

Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)

General

- 3.107 The interview was with the Chair of the LEP, who was new in post. In consequence she did not yet have a full picture of the situation across the County and felt unable to answer some questions. The Government want economic strategic plans and local industrial strategies to be submitted through the LEPs. Nottinghamshire CC is important in the industrial strategy. The LEP should be independent of local authorities but work in partnership.

Main opinions

- 3.108 She recognises there will always be challenges, but:

It would be wrong for me to comment on whether this would be a way forward on those challenges.

- 3.109 Collaboration and evidence are essential:

To progress there needs to be a much more collaborative working in the first instance. If they cannot work closely now, why would they want a closer relationship?

Make an opportunity for it to become more collaborative and look at the prosperity of Nottingham City and Shire as a totality rather than how I persuade my constituents how I’m doing well on their behalf.

The role of the LEP is to see what opportunities there are and to get people to work with the LEP in a collaborative way.

Evidence is needed to show that reduced service costs would be the outcome; decisions should be made on evidence.

Written submissions

Introduction

- 3.110 Written submissions were received from Nottinghamshire Police and Crime Commissioner, a Voluntary Action organisation and three Parish and Town Councils. The term ‘the proposal’ was used in the some submissions, but this was initial engagement and no actual proposal had been put forward.

Main Findings

Police and Crime Commissioner

- 3.111 When designing any restructuring of political boundaries, the structural implications, disruption and cost for Nottinghamshire Police need to be considered:

Policing in Nottinghamshire is organised operationally to deliver local policing over two defined geographical areas, each led by a Superintendent together with its underlying supporting and partnership structures.

The organisational structures and technical aspects such as performance monitoring software and operational radio channels are aligned to these two areas.

Each neighbourhood policing team is locally based, mainly co-located with partners in partner buildings (some being district or borough council buildings). Some ownership arrangements have many years to run before break clauses.

The Police have invested heavily at a strategic and local level to ensure this delivery model is supported to best serve the public of Nottinghamshire.

Boundary changes often cost considerable amounts of capital, especially for IT re-configurations. No budget has been set aside for this at present.

Voluntary Sector Organisation

- 3.112 Following the Voluntary Sector workshop, Ashfield Voluntary Action considered the possible geographic split of the County and concluded that in any split of the County:

Ashfield and Mansfield should remain in the same unitary.

Ashfield has always aligned itself with Mansfield and does not see itself as being part of Nottingham.

Three Parish and Town Councils

- 3.113 Submissions were received from Caythorpe Parish Council, Carlton in Lindrick Parish Council and Newark Town council. The main opinions of the three Parish and Town Councils are:

One supports the principle of unitaries, but not the options as they stand.

Two are against moving to a unitary structure.

- 3.114 The main concerns echo those expressed in the deliberative engagement meetings:

Short deadlines which allow little or no time for informed comment to be prepared at parish and local community level.

Need for more information – a business case and comparable information about alternative structures.

A fear that rural communities would be in competition with more densely populated urban and industrial areas.

Concern about a reduction in community engagement and local representation.

A lack of engagement with the City, borough and district Councils.

The exclusion of Nottingham City and the option of expanding the City boundaries.

- 3.115 One put forward a view on the question of how to split the County *if re-organisation shows that there are some real, substantial and long-term cost savings to be made:*

Two Unitary Councils, split North and South

Bassetlaw and parts of Rushcliffe forming one Unitary Council

Mansfield, Ashfield, Broxtowe, Gedling and the remainder of Rushcliffe forming the other

Nottingham City Council and Nottinghamshire County Council remaining unchanged

Subject to greenbelt considerations

- 3.116 Other comments were:

Include the role of Parish and Town Councils in any proposal; devolving services so that local services are provided closer to the Community that use them and improving local accountability.

The risk of 'Double Taxation' needs to be addressed; some parts of Nottinghamshire do not have a Parish or Town Council. Under a unitary structure, this could lead to those people living in areas covered by a Parish or Town Council paying for their particular services through a Parish Precept and also contributing to the same or similar services provided by a Unitary Council for those areas where there is no Local Council.

A concern that a change to a Unitary Structure might lead to the introduction of a cap on Parish/Town Councils' precepts.

A request for a statement that any existing devolution agreements between Parish Councils and their District Council will be honoured.