

ALCESTER TOWN COUNCIL

REPORT ON PROPOSALS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

FULL COUNCIL - 2ND SEPTEMBER 2025

Background

1. The Government published the English Devolution White Paper on 16 December 2024 which outlined its commitment to the devolution of powers from central Government to “Strategic Authorities”.
2. The White Paper identified that these “Strategic Authorities” would be made up of “unitary” and not “two-tier” local authority areas.
3. Through a process of local government reorganisation there will be the abolition of all remaining two-tier local government across England. Following previous rounds of local government reorganisation there are currently 21 County Council areas remaining which include a total of 164 District/Borough Councils, all these authorities will be replaced with unitary authorities.
4. Alcester Town Council (in terms of organisation, responsibilities, staff and assets) will not be directly affected by the reorganisation and will continue as previously.
5. The reorganisation will result in the abolition of Warwickshire County Council and Stratford-on-Avon District Council (together with the other District and Borough Councils in the County).
6. In February 2025 the County, District and Borough Councils received a letter from the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government requesting that proposals be submitted to Government for local government reorganisation in Warwickshire by 28 November 2025.
7. Within the letter the Government identified the six criteria which would be used in determining the most appropriate local government structures for our area, these being:
 - a) A proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government.
 - b) Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.
 - c) Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens.
 - d) Proposals should show how councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views.
 - e) New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements.
 - f) New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment.
8. In order to comply with 7 d) consultations are currently being undertaken by both Warwickshire County Council and Stratford-on-Avon District Council to establish local views.

Options

9. There are two potential options:
 - a) A single unitary authority based on the existing County boundary
 - b) A two unitary solution using existing District and Borough boundaries as building blocks for a North/South split, with each part made up as follows:
 - North Warwickshire – North Warwickshire Borough Council, Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council and Rugby Borough Council.
 - South Warwickshire – Stratford-on-Avon District Council and Warwick District Council
10. Warwickshire County Council commissioned a report from PwC in 2020 which recommends a single unitary authority and can be read here <https://democracy.warwickshire.gov.uk/documents/s8821/Appendix%201%20LGR%20in%20Warwickshire%20-%20Strategic%20Case%20for%20Change.pdf>
11. Stratford-on-Avon District Council commissioned a report from Deloitte which recommends a two unitary solution which can be read here: <https://www.stratford.gov.uk/doc/213895/name/Appendix%204.pdf>

Consultations

12. Warwickshire County Council has run a month-long online consultation which was not specifically directed at town and parish councils but available for completion by residents, businesses, community groups etc. We understand that a consultation with parish and town councils is to follow.
13. On 14th July, Stratford-on-Avon District Council formally decided that its preferred option was a two unitary solution and is currently running a consultation based on this engagement leaflet https://shapingourcouncils.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/J29580_Warwickshire-North-South-Engagement-Document_Web_FINAL.pdf
14. The SDC consultation is here: https://online.ors.org.uk/questionnaire/3106808?clear_session=true&language=en

Potential response from Alcester Town Council

Alcester Town Council has no obligation to choose between the two options and indeed the final decision will be made by the Government and may well be a *fait accompli* in any event. However, in view of the fact that this is the most significant change in local government for 50 years, ATC may choose to have a view.

Potential responses are set out below:

Response A – Single Unitary

After careful consideration, Alcester Town Council supports the creation of a single unitary authority for Warwickshire, rather than the establishment of two smaller unitary authorities based on a north/south division.

Reasons for this Position

1. Clarity and Simplicity for Residents

- A single unitary authority would provide residents and businesses across Warwickshire with a clear point of accountability.
- The current two-tier system often leads to confusion about which authority is responsible for which services. A single unitary would reduce duplication and improve service visibility.

2. Financial Sustainability

- A county-wide unitary structure would be more efficient, reducing overhead costs and releasing resources for frontline services.
- Retaining two smaller unitary authorities risks duplication of leadership, management, and service commissioning, thereby limiting potential savings.

3. Strategic Capacity

- A single Warwickshire authority would be better positioned to make strategic decisions on transport, planning, economic development, climate action, and public health.
- It would also strengthen Warwickshire's voice regionally and nationally, ensuring fair access to funding and investment opportunities.

4. Community Representation and Localism

- Alcester Town Council acknowledges the importance of local decision-making and would expect a strong system of area or locality boards to be embedded within a unitary structure.
- We believe a single unitary should be underpinned by robust delegation to parish and town councils, ensuring that the distinct identities of Warwickshire's market towns and villages are respected and supported.

5. Future Resilience

- With increasing pressures on local government finances and demand for services, a single unitary provides greater resilience and capacity to adapt to future challenges.
- Fragmenting Warwickshire into smaller authorities risks uneven service standards and weaker resilience.

Conclusion

Alcester Town Council therefore supports the creation of a single unitary authority for Warwickshire, accompanied by strengthened powers and resources for parish and town councils to ensure that local accountability and responsiveness are not diminished.

Response B – Two Unitary Solution

After consideration, Alcester Town Council supports the creation of two unitary authorities for Warwickshire, broadly along north/south lines, rather than a single county-wide unitary authority.

Reasons for this Position

1. Local Identity and Community Cohesion

- Warwickshire is a diverse county with clear differences between the north and south in terms of economy, settlement patterns, transport links, and community identity.
- A north/south split would allow each new unitary authority to be more closely aligned to the needs and aspirations of its residents, preserving the distinct identity of South Warwickshire.

2. Accessibility and Accountability

- A single county-wide authority risks creating an organisation that feels too remote and distant from residents, particularly those in smaller market towns and rural areas.
- Two smaller unitaries would be more approachable, ensuring residents, businesses, and local organisations can engage effectively with decision-makers.

3. Balanced Service Delivery

- The needs of communities in South Warwickshire – which include rural infrastructure, tourism, heritage, and market town vitality – differ significantly from those in the more urbanised north.
- Two unitaries would enable services to be designed and delivered with greater sensitivity to local circumstances, avoiding a “one size fits all” approach.

4. Economic Development and Strategic Focus

- South Warwickshire has distinct economic drivers, including Stratford-upon-Avon’s global tourism sector and the high-skilled economy around Warwick and Leamington Spa.
- A dedicated South Warwickshire unitary could focus on maximising these strengths while ensuring that investment and infrastructure priorities reflect local needs.

5. Strengthening Local Democracy

- While efficiencies must be achieved, Alcester Town Council is concerned that a single large unitary authority could lead to democratic deficit.

- Two authorities would mean decision-making is kept closer to communities, with more opportunities for town and parish councils to engage meaningfully in governance.

Conclusion

Alcester Town Council therefore supports the establishment of two unitary authorities for Warwickshire, ensuring that South Warwickshire has a local government structure that reflects its identity, supports its communities, and addresses its specific challenges.

We emphasise the importance of robust devolution of powers to parish and town councils in any reorganisation model, to guarantee that local accountability and grassroots democracy are not weakened.