The case for Three Unitary Councils in a Future Leicestershire & Rutland.

Key Headlines

- Engaged with the general public, elected members and staff across the 8 authorities. Also engaged with over 600 key stakeholders and local partners. See Appendix A.

- Survey received 4,646 responses, providing a robust sample size. This allows us to be 99% confident that the results reflect the views of the entire population, with a margin of error of approximately ±2%.

- Of those who expressed a preference, 82% favoured the North, City, South model, while 18% preferred a single unitary model for Leicestershire and Rutland.

- 74% of respondents were interested in the decision-making process, 71% in local service provision, 48% in community representation and 44% in Council Tax rates.

- Top concerns: Loss of local identity and representation, service quality and accessibility, financial implications and Council Tax.

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Background

In a remarkable display of unity and collaboration, our 8 local authorities have come together to navigate the complexities of Local Government reorganisation. This unique partnership underscores our collective commitment to working seamlessly across boundaries, ensuring we adapt to change effectively and efficiently.

To facilitate this, we have established several structured groups, each comprising representatives from all 8 authorities. These groups are:

· Council Leaders
· Chief Executives
· Deputy Chief Executives
· Communications and Engagement
· Human Resources
· Monitoring Officers
· Section 151/Finance

Council Leaders meet regularly and are fully engaged with Local Government Reorganisation. The governance process includes political sign-off by each of the 8 authorities.

Among these groups, the Communications and Engagement Group plays a pivotal role, leading our engagement efforts and coordinating with other cross-council groups, particularly the Chief Executives Group. This collaborative approach has proven to be highly effective, enabling a culture of cooperation and mutual support.

Our comprehensive strategies for both external and internal communications ensure that we engage meaningfully with residents, staff, elected members and other stakeholders, keeping them informed and involved throughout the reorganisation process. This collective effort highlights our dedication to working together for the benefit of our communities.

Introduction

A programme of engagement was undertaken to provide the public and key stakeholders with the opportunity to share their views about the strengths, challenges and opportunities with the North, City, South model. These insights will help to shape the future of local government in Leicestershire and Rutland.

Our initial engagement priorities:

- Gather feedback from key strategic stakeholders and local partners on the interim proposal for smaller unitary authorities
- Establish two-way conversations about stakeholders' priorities and concerns
- Collect input from the public on what is most important to them when interacting with their local council
- Identify key issues, concerns and opportunities to refine our proposals
- Assess the level of support from the public and stakeholders for the North, City, South model

This report provides a summary of the findings of this engagement work, outlining the findings, the results and key themes captured.

Methodology

The 8 councils used a range of internal and external channels to reach and engage with audiences, adhering to core principles of clear, transparent and objective communications throughout the process.

Engagement began in December 2024 with elected members and staff across the 8 authorities. Wider key stakeholder and public engagement started on 26 February 2025 to inform the Interim Plan, including the launch of an online survey. Additionally, face-to-face and virtual focus groups were held, along with one-to-one meetings with key stakeholders and local partners. These sessions provided additional insights alongside the survey results.

A cross-authority effort was made across the 8 authorities to promote participation in the survey and attendance at meetings and focus groups. Key channels included:

- More than 450 emails and letters with key stakeholders and local partners to highlight the online survey and invite them to meetings/briefings
- Promotional materials on websites and social media channels
- Email newsletters
- 30 meetings or briefings with elected members and staff, plus videos and articles
- Contact with housing tenants (retained housing stock in Hinckley & Bosworth, Melton and Charnwood)
- 9 briefings with MPs across Leicestershire and Rutland
- 9 press releases and media statements from December 2024 to March 2025

"The plans are rooted firmly in ensuring equity across the 3 proposed areas, enabling more effective leadership and services leading to efficiencies whilst allowing the retention of local identities and a sense of place, essential for communities to flourish and thrive. The collective power of a more unified approach alongside the retention of local identity is exciting, especially for schools and other services that are firmly rooted within their communities."

- Redmoor Academy, Hinckley

Communications Reach

The engagement efforts resulted in extensive communications reach to the public:

- Over 90 pieces of media coverage across local press, radio, regional television and trade media
- Contacted over 40 local schools
- Across the 8 authority websites there have been more than 10,000 views to webpages outlining Local Government Reorganisation and the interim proposals
- 34 emails were sent, with a total reach of more than 163,000, resulting in over 8,000 clicks to the survey
- With an average open rate of 57.5%, email proved to be the most successful engagement tool

"Leicestershire Promotions offer our support and input into the ongoing process and will always strive to ensure that the outcome is in the best interests of our visitor economy partners. We support the approach you are taking in ensuring a proper debate and are encouraged by your efforts to be inclusive in shaping your proposal. Please do continue to make use of our expertise and experience as we commit to being actively engaged in the ongoing debate and emerging proposals."

- Leicestershire Promotions

Staff engagement and elected members

We have implemented a collectively-agreed internal communications strategy to keep our staff and elected members informed and engaged. Regular briefings and question-and-answer sessions have been a cornerstone of this approach, providing forums where concerns can be voiced and addressed directly. From these sessions we have developed detailed, evolving FAQs that address emerging issues and provide clarity on the process.

Our comprehensive internal communications have included regular information being shared with staff and engagement through:

- All-staff briefings with the opportunity to ask questions in person or anonymously
- Ideas sessions
- Structured conversations with heads of service
- One-to-one and team meetings
- Newsletters
- Email
- Intranet updates and FAQs
- Videos

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The engagement sessions have been led by the Chief Executive of each authority, with support from the Communications and Engagement Group. Additionally, the Council leader at each authority has attended some briefings to offer an overview and provide reassurance regarding Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation. Each authority conducts in-person briefing sessions at key stages, such as following the submission of the Interim Proposal.

Elected members have been kept thoroughly informed through dedicated briefing sessions designed to provide in-depth information about the reorganisation process. Regular updates at council meetings ensure that all members have consistent access to the latest developments. We have supplemented these formal settings with targeted email communication that addresses specific aspects of reorganisation and updates on the latest developments.

We recognise that employees and councillors work at the very heart of our communities and possess valuable insights into community needs and are themselves directly affected by reorganisation, making their engagement particularly important to our process.

Public engagement - This initial engagement has been kept simple, asking the public to share what is most important to them when they think of their local council, Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation.

It also invited comments on our preferred option for three councils for North, City and South.

Key stakeholders - The focus of this engagement was to gather insights from public sector providers, key strategic stakeholder and local partners including organisations representing different sectors.

Our engagement reached a wide range of organisations including, but not limited to: MPs, Leicestershire Police, parish and town councils, the Police and Crime Commissioner, East Midlands Chamber of Commerce, Voluntary Action Leicestershire, University Hospitals NHS Trust, tenant scrutiny panels, housing associations, Midlands Engine and trade unions.

Local partners - We drew on our existing relationships with a range of local partners – businesses, developers and community groups who we work with on a day-to-day basis.

These established relationships facilitated initial conversations with the people who collectively make up the fabric of our area, allowing us to gauge their thoughts on Local Government Reorganisation and understand their priorities, concerns and opinions on our preferred model.

"Devolution for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland has the opportunity to be a mechanism for the East Midlands to unlock its economic growth potential by creating an environment and landscape for the business community to thrive, to grow and create high value jobs."
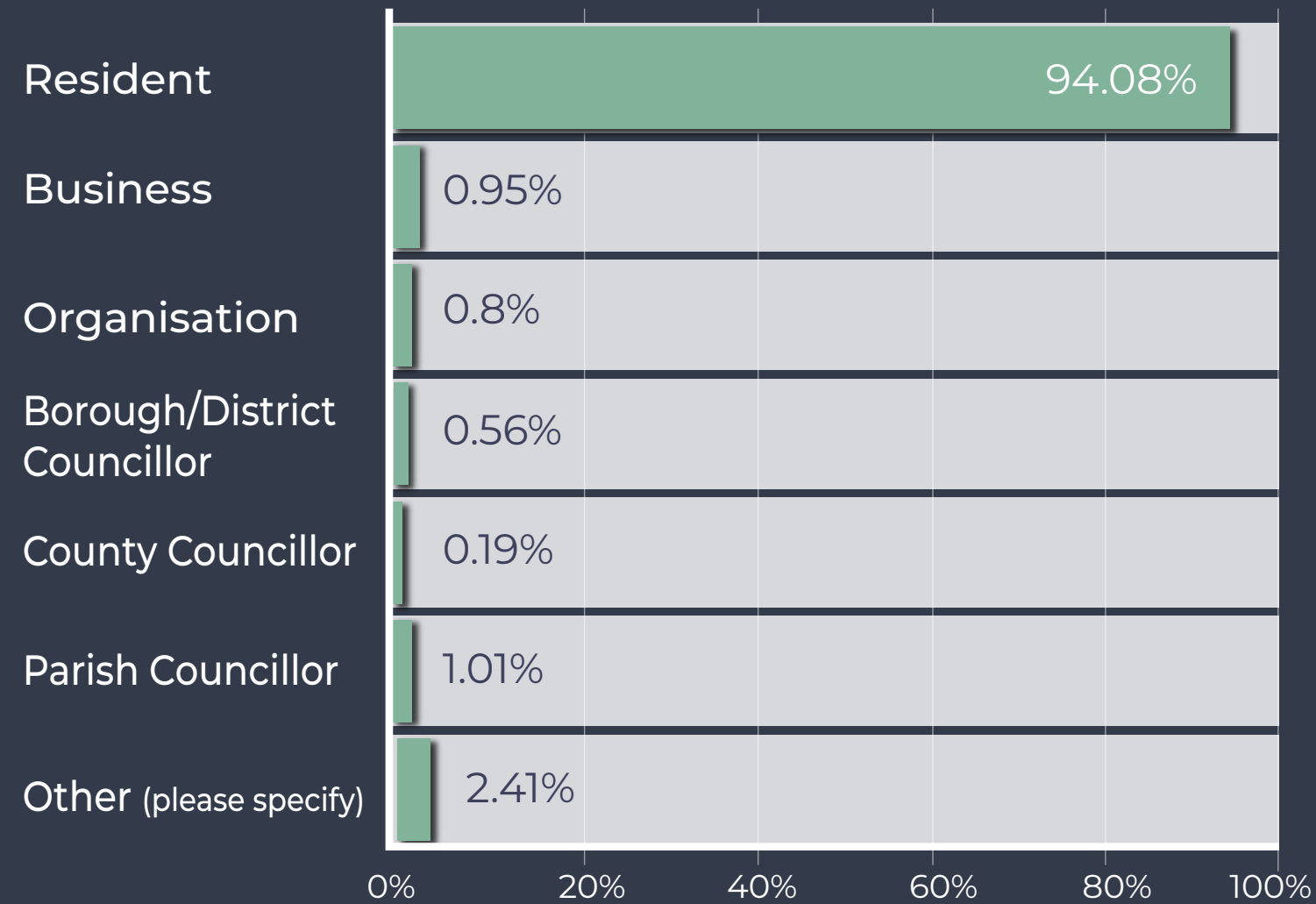
- East Midlands Chamber

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Responses

In total the survey received **4,646** responses from the public and stakeholders.

4,366 of responses were from residents, **128** from organisations and businesses and **152** from councillors or others.

More views were captured through the one-to-one discussions and face-to-face engagement with local partners and key stakeholders.

Responses by geographical area were well spread.

Please indicate in which capacity you are responding to the survey

Category	Percentage
Resident	94.08%
Business	0.95%
Organisation	0.8%
Borough/District Councillor	0.56%
County Councillor	0.19%
Parish Councillor	1.01%
Other (please specify)	2.41%

Responses by area

Area	Responses
Blaby	657
Charnwood	653
Harborough	129
Hinckley & Bosworth	843
Melton	171
North West Leicestershire	1,304
Oadby & Wigston	576
Rutland	291
Organisation in multiple areas	31

Percentage of population who responded

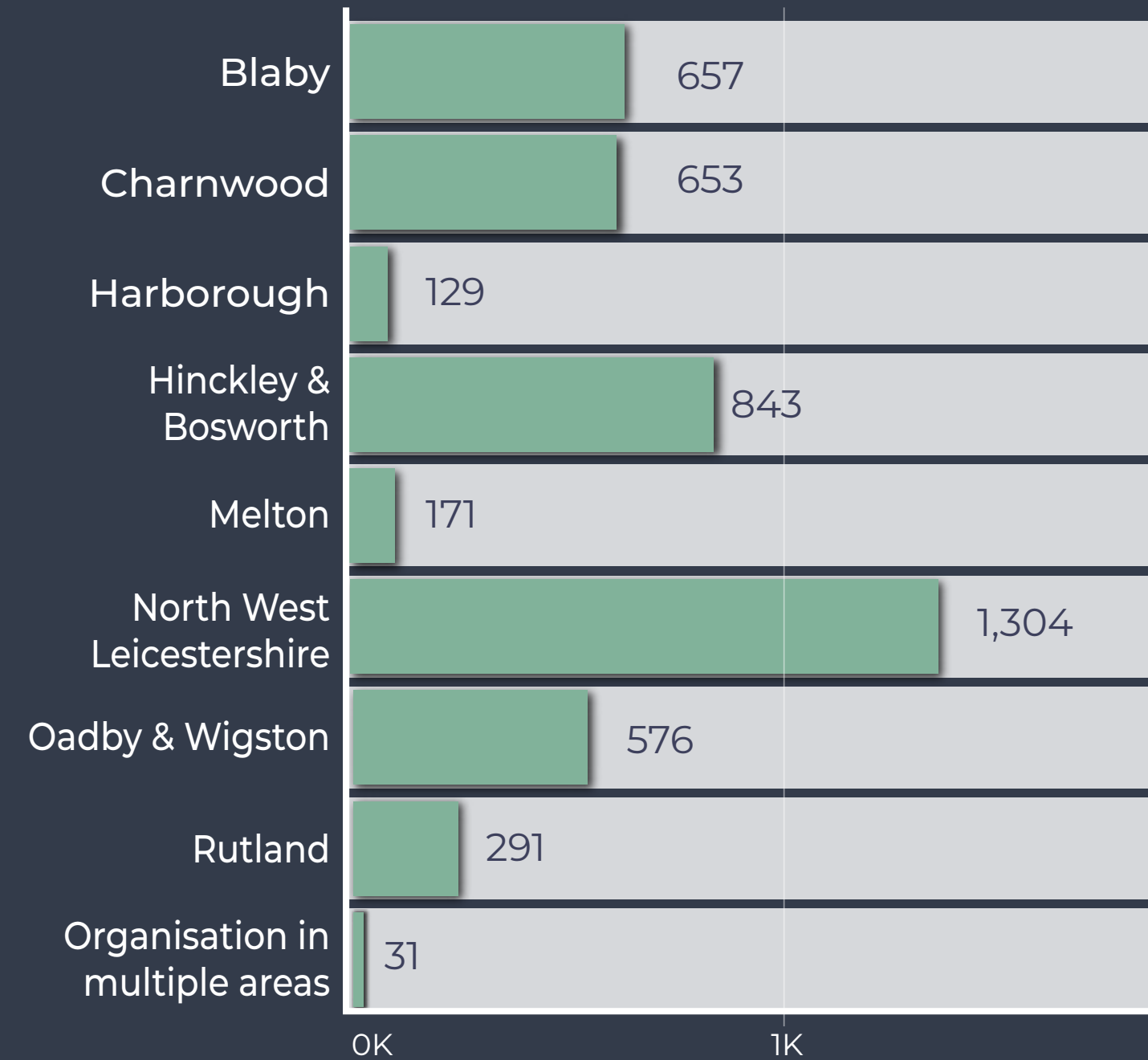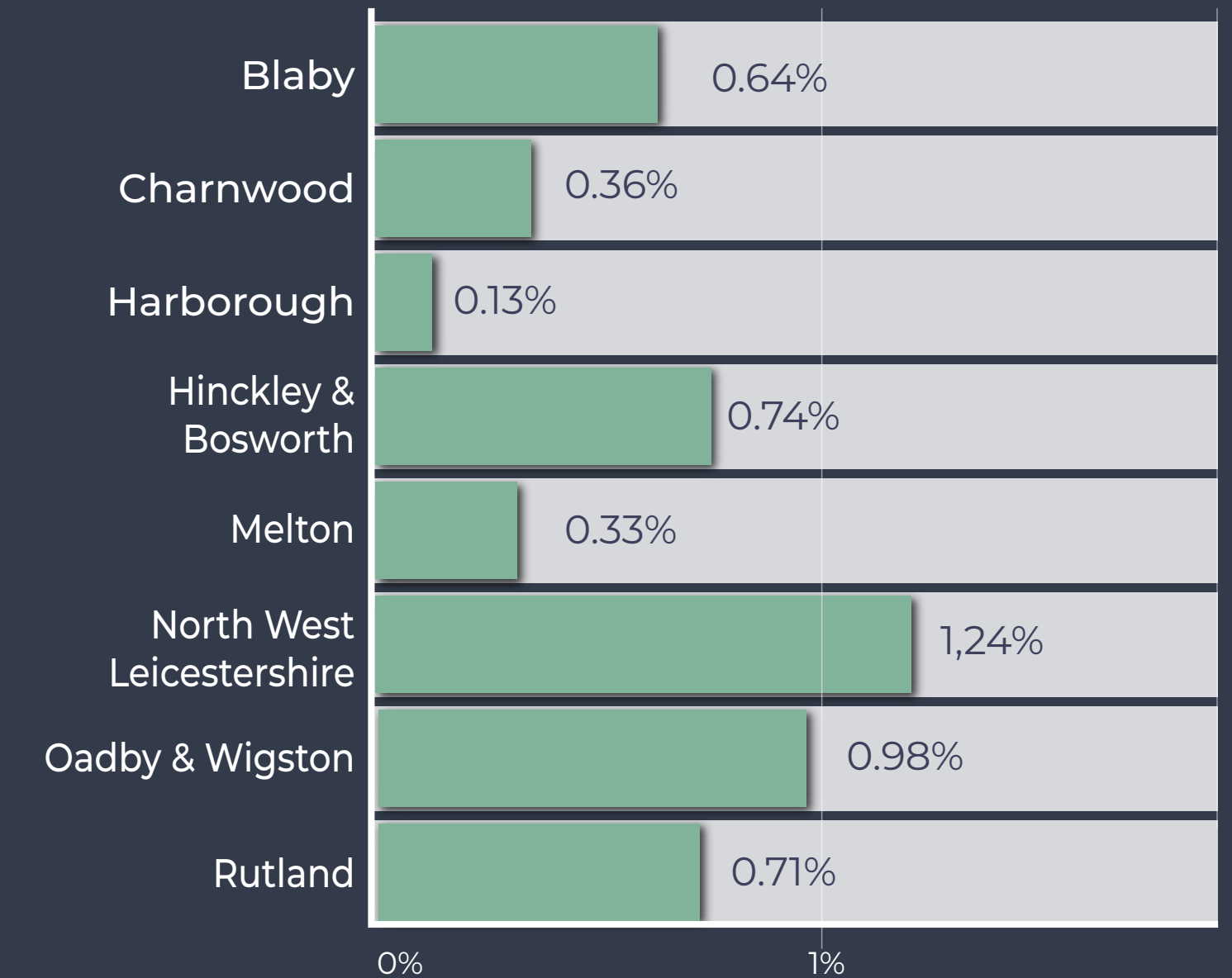| Area	Percentage
Blaby	0.64%
Charnwood	0.36%
Harborough	0.13%
Hinckley & Bosworth	0.74%
Melton	0.33%
North West Leicestershire	1.24%
Oadby & Wigston	0.98%
Rutland	0.71%

With a combined current population of over 750,000 in Leicestershire and Rutland, the 4,646 responses to the survey provide a robust sample size. This allows us to be 99% confident that the results reflect the views of the entire population, with a margin of error of approximately ±2%. This level of engagement underscores the public's keen interest in voicing their opinions on matters directly affecting local government.

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Survey Findings

Quantitative

Which of these issues are you most interested in when it comes to the subject of devolution and Local Government Reorganisation?

A significant 74% of respondents expressed interest in how decisions affecting their local area would be made. This was closely followed by 71% of respondents who were interested in how local services would be provided. Interestingly, these two concerns were the top issues across all local authority areas.

Concerns about how local communities would be represented (48%) and Council Tax rates (44%) came in third and fourth.

> **"We welcome the North/South unitary model, which makes sense for both the northern and southern parts of the city. The inclusion of Rutland is a positive step. It's essential to support housing and issues within the housing sector and as an organisation we already have really strong relationships with districts and boroughs."**
>
> - East Midlands Housing Association

Which of these issues are you most interested in when it comes to the subject of devolution and Local Government Reorganisation? Please select at most 3 options.
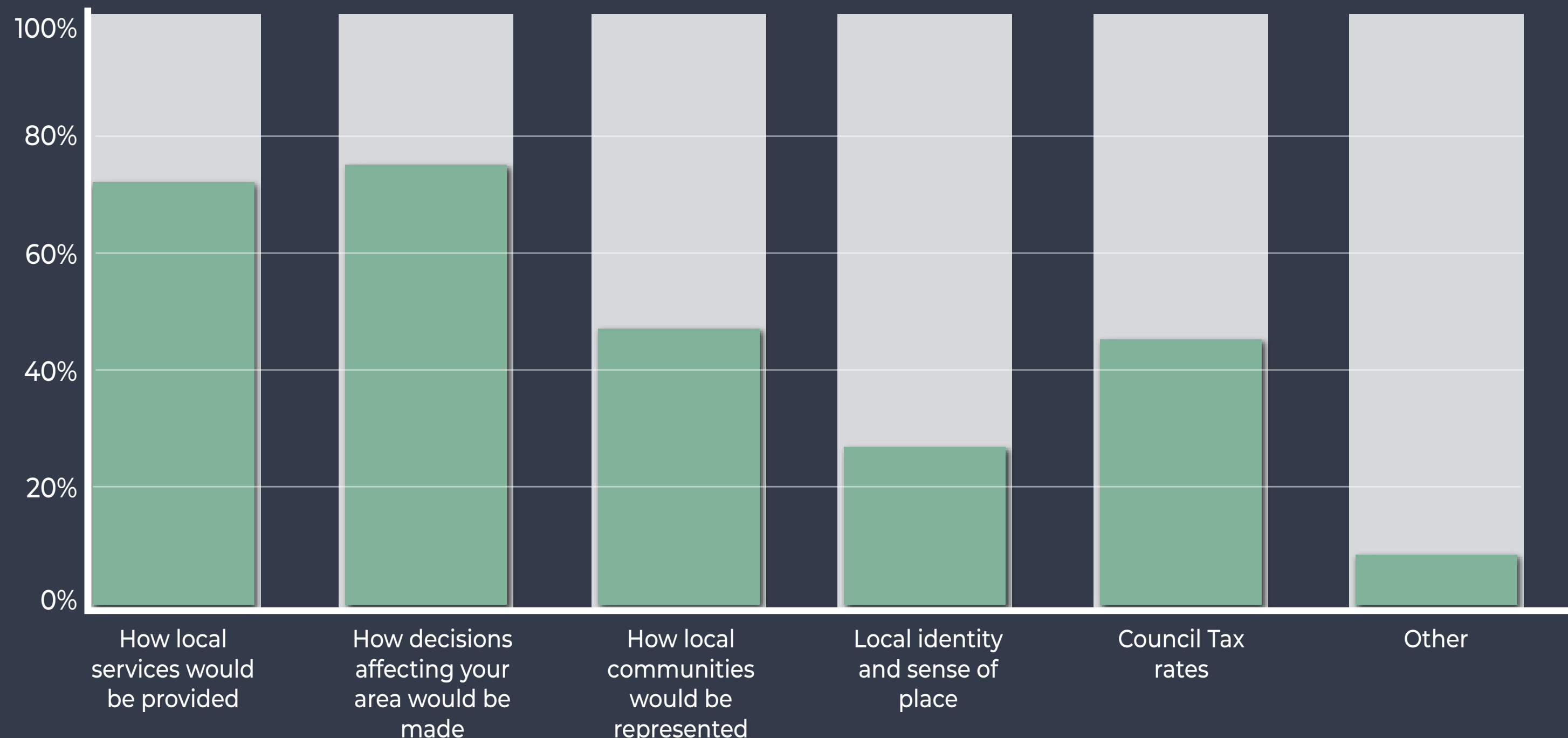
Qualitative

There were 3,618 respondents who had initial comments about reorganising councils in our area, devolution or the emerging preferred option for 3 unitary councils for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland.

Top ten categories of comments

Support for the North, City, South proposal
Many respondents supported the proposal for three unitary councils, viewing it as the optimal choice. They believed this structure struck a good balance between local representation and efficient service delivery. Some considered it a sensible and reasonable approach.

Opposition to a single unitary authority
A significant number of respondents opposed a single unitary authority for Leicestershire. They worried that a large, centralised authority would be too remote and less accountable, unable to address the diverse needs of local communities. Some believed it would lead to a decline in service quality and a loss of local identity.

Concerns about Leicester City's influence
Some respondents were concerned about Leicester City's potential dominance in any reorganisation. They sought assurance that villages bordering the city would not be absorbed, and that the city's boundaries would remain unchanged.

Importance of local representation and identity
Many comments emphasised the importance of maintaining local representation and identity. The respondents believed that local councils are better suited to understand and address the specific needs of their communities.

Doubts about cost savings and efficiency
Some respondents questioned whether the reorganisation would yield actual cost savings or improve efficiency. They expressed concerns about the costs associated with rebranding, redundancies, and establishing new administrative structures.

Specific concerns about the proposed boundaries
Several comments mentioned the proposed boundaries of the new unitary councils. A particular point of discussion was the inclusion of Rutland in the North Leicestershire area. Some respondents felt Rutland had stronger connections with South Leicestershire or South Kesteven.

Call for a referendum
A few respondents advocated for a local referendum to enable voters to express their opinions on the proposed changes.

The performance of existing councils
Some comments praised the services and communication of their existing councils.

Impact on services
Many expressed concerns about how the reorganisation would affect various services, including waste collection, social care, education, and transport.

Job losses
Several comments voiced concerns about potential job losses resulting from the reorganisation.
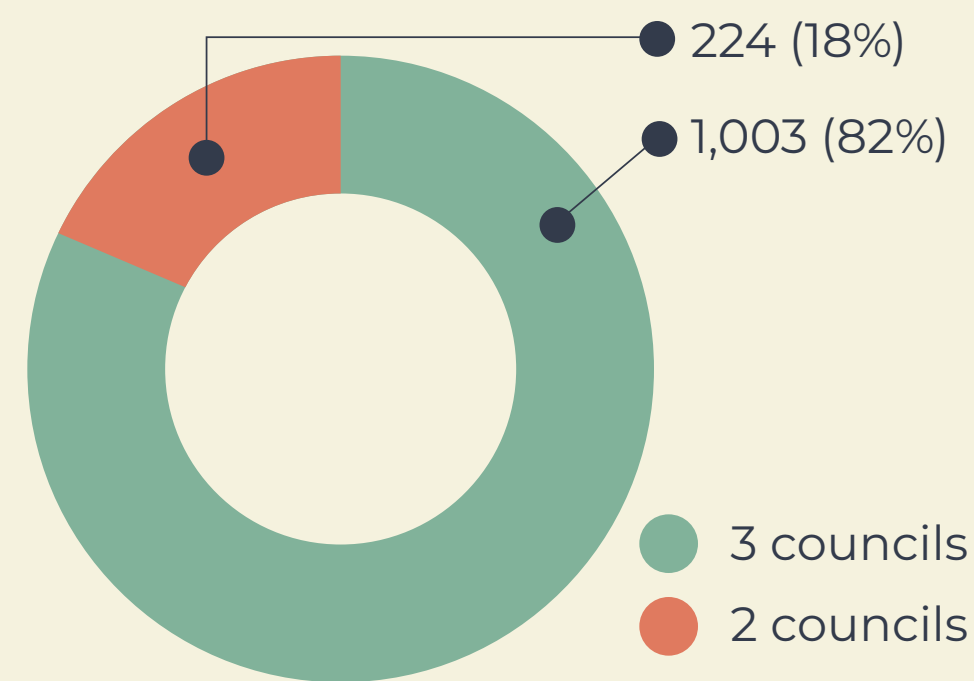

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Do people prefer a single unitary authority for Leicestershire and Rutland, or splitting it into two?

3 councils (Leicester City plus 2 councils for the rest of Leicestershire and Rutland): This option was the most widely supported. Many respondents felt that a single council for the entire region would be too large and remote, potentially overlooking local needs and concerns. They also expressed concerns about the city dominating the county.

2 councils (Leicester City plus 1 council for the rest of Leicestershire and Rutland): Some comments supported a single council for the county and a separate one for the city. A few responses indicated that this structure could be more cost-effective and avoid duplication. However, this option generally received less support than the three-council proposal.

Of the **3,618** comments, **34%** said they had a preferred model. Of those, **82%** said they prefer the 3 council model, and just **18%** said they preferred a 2 council model for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland.

If splitting Leicestershire and Rutland into 2, what were people's opinions of whether to split authorities into north/south or east/west?

North/South Split:

· Many comments support the North/South split. The proposal suggests one council to serve North Leicestershire and Rutland (currently served by Charnwood, North West Leicestershire, and Melton, as well as Rutland County Council) and one for South Leicestershire (currently served by Blaby, Harborough, Hinckley & Bosworth, and Oadby & Wigston).

· Some comments express concern that a North/South division doesn't account for local identities and suggest there isn't a strong connection between the areas in the proposed North and South groupings. For example, some struggle to see what North West Leicestershire has in common with Melton or Rutland.

· Some suggest that the North/South split does not align well with transport infrastructure.

East/West Split:

· Some comments suggest an East/West split might be better.

· The East/West proposal suggests one council consisting of Hinckley & Bosworth, Blaby, North West Leicestershire, and Charnwood, and another consisting of Harborough, Oadby & Wigston, Melton, and Rutland.

· Some suggest an East/West split would better reflect the local economy, geography, road networks, infrastructure, and population movement. Also, some believe an East/West divide would create groupings with more similar needs and stronger connections.

· Some comments note that an East/West split may result in an uneven population distribution between the councils.

· Some suggest that the city of Leicester inhibits travel between the East and West.

Comments showing a preference

224 (18%)
1,003 (82%)

● 3 councils
● 2 councils

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What are the top ten concerns expressed in the comments?

Based on the comments from the Local Government Reorganisation engagement survey, here are ten frequently expressed concerns:

Loss of Local Identity and Representation:
Many comments express concern that local identities will be lost. People are worried that local issues won't be heard or understood by a larger, more remote council. Some comments highlight the importance of councillors having a thorough knowledge of the locality.

Service Quality and Accessibility:
A significant worry is that the quality of services will decline after the changes, with stretched resources spread over a wider area. There are also fears that it will become more difficult for individuals to access help and that services will become more distant.

Financial Implications and Council Tax:
Many comments express concerns about Council Tax increases and whether any cost savings will be passed on to ratepayers. There are worries that better-off areas will subsidise those with greater needs, which some consider inherently unfair.

Planning Decisions and Green Spaces:
Concerns exist that larger councils may be more inclined to approve developments on greenfield sites, without considering the impact on local services and infrastructure.

Impact on Smaller Towns and Villages:
Residents of smaller towns and villages worry that their needs will be overlooked and that they will come low down when funding is being sorted out.

Job Losses and Staffing:
Concerns exist regarding potential job losses and the impact on council staff.

Accountability and Democracy:
Some comments suggest that reorganisation moves away from local accountability. They worry that the new authorities will not be able to make improvements to infrastructure.

Efficiency and Cost Savings:
Doubts are expressed about whether any real savings will occur or whether service delivery will be reduced. Some believe that bigger does not always mean more efficient.

Transition and Disruption:
Concerns exist about the initial changeover period and potential disruption to services.

Role of a Mayor:
The need for a mayor is questioned.

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Conclusion

In conclusion, the engagement has successfully gathered a wealth of initial insights from a diverse range of stakeholders, including residents, councillors, local partners and stakeholders. The feedback received highlights the community's strong interest in how decisions are made and services are provided, underscoring the importance of local representation and identity.

The survey findings reveal extensive support with 82% of those expressing a preference agreeing with the proposal for 3 councils. There was significant opposition to the potential dominance of a single unitary authority with the importance of preserving local identities being clearly articulated.

The qualitative responses provide valuable perspectives on the proposed boundaries, cost implications and the impact on services. Additionally, concerns about job losses, accountability, efficiency and transition disruption have been highlighted. These insights will be instrumental in refining our full proposal and addressing the key issues raised by the community.

Overall, the engagement process, albeit short, has demonstrated a high level of public interest and participation, reflecting the community's commitment to shaping the future of local government in Leicestershire and Rutland. As we move forward, the feedback collected will guide our efforts to create a more responsive, efficient and representative local government structure that meets the needs of stakeholders.

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Future Engagement Plans

To develop a robust full proposal for submission in November 2025, further comprehensive engagement will be essential. This process will allow more detailed feedback to be gathered on specific proposals.

This stage of engagement will be broader, targeting a wider range of audiences. Channels would be established to reach seldom-heard groups and individuals to ensure their views are included in the decision-making process.

Given the scale and significance of the full proposal, external independent support will be commissioned to lead this engagement work, supported by the 8 councils. Any future consultation and engagement will adhere to the Gunning Principles, ensuring that they are carried out fairly and transparently.

Elements of this next phase of engagement could include a dedicated website, telephone surveys with residents, facilitated focus groups, business forums and stakeholder interviews. The findings of this engagement work will be analysed and a detailed report produced. This inclusive approach will help us to gather a comprehensive understanding of the community's needs and preferences, ensuring that our proposals are well-informed and representative of all stakeholders.

"The alignment of this geographical split delivers balance to our economic geography and maintains critical local relationships to support our continued growth. As one of UK Government's priority sites featured in the Invest 2035 Industrial Strategy prospectus, we need an optimal structure for Local Government to drive future investment by prioritising strategic growth corridors and addressing infrastructure challenges at the appropriate level of governance. The proposal for North and South Leicestershire Authorities delivers this through the natural alignment with Parliamentary constituencies and the geographical balance of assets and opportunities for investment.

To deliver on our growth potential we need local relationships combined with a regional scale that enables us to compete globally. This proposal with its approach to appropriate collaborations across complementary regional geographies gives us what we need where the other proposal for a single unitary for Leicestershire does not."

- Mira

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Appendix A
Key stakeholders and local partners

We engaged with over 600 key stakeholders and local partners

Health care organisations

Sports and leisure providers

Emergency services

Education providers

Business sector
Businesses and organisations representing a range of sectors including: chambers of trade, housing and commercial developers, manufacturing, logistics, tourism, aerospace, research and development, retail, and transport.

Community, voluntary and charitable organisations
A diverse range of individual community and voluntary groups.

Housing associations and tenant groups
Representing the wide range of social housing providers operating in the area.
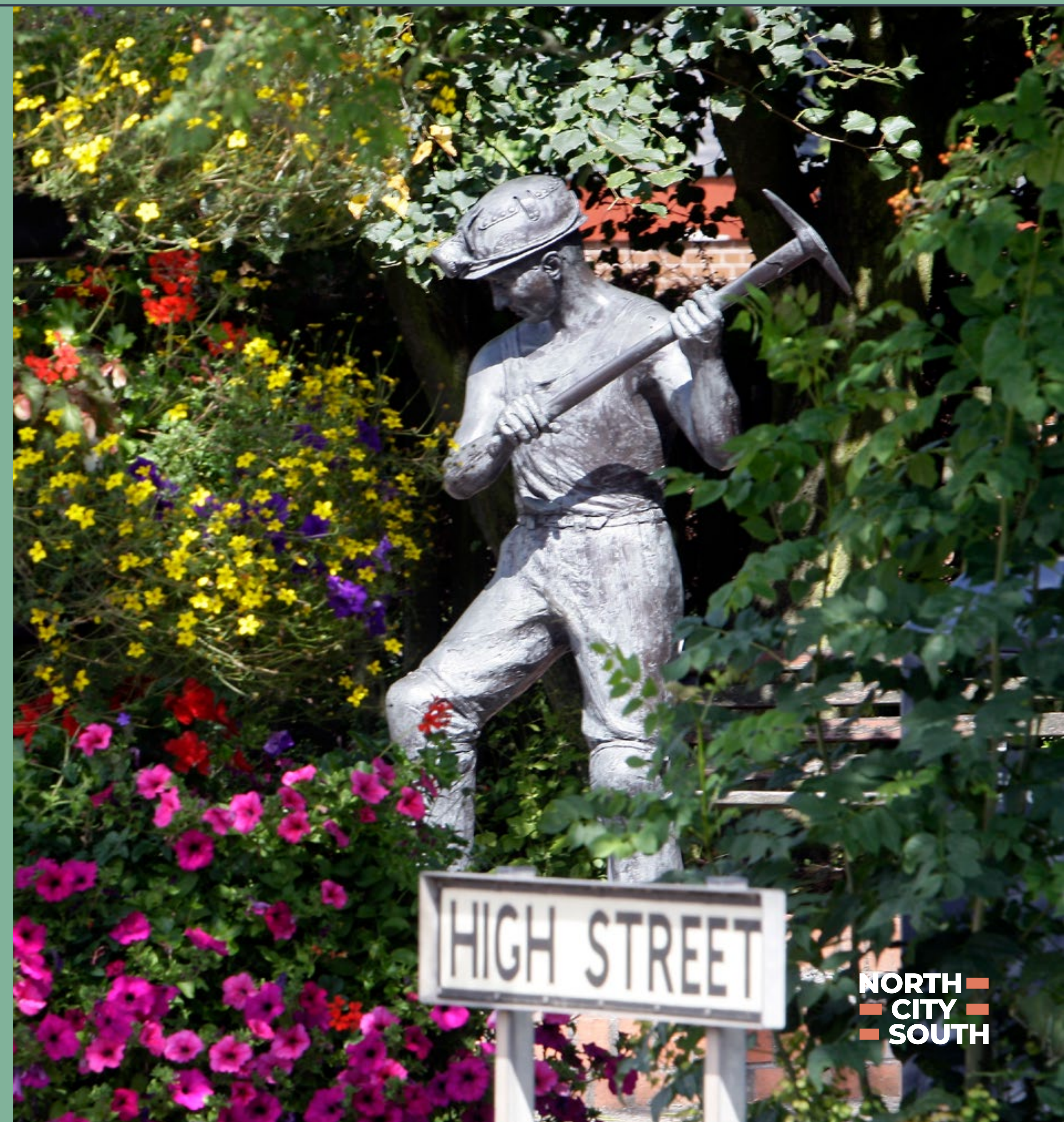
Regional government bodies

Politicians and Local Government organisations across Leicestershire and the East Midlands

Leicester City Council

Leicestershire County Council

MPs across Leicestershire and Rutland

283 Town and Parish councils

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