

The future of local government in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire

Engagement report: Methodology and clarification report - October 2025

Introduction

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)

Nottinghamshire currently has a two-tier system, with seven district and borough councils and a county council. Nottingham City, within the county boundary, is served separately by its own unitary council—making nine councils in total.

In February 2025, the Government invited local councils, including those in Nottinghamshire, to develop proposals to replace two-tier systems with larger unitary councils.

After reviewing options, Nottinghamshire's councils submitted an interim proposal in March 2025 to create two new unitary councils to replace the existing nine.

The main report summarises the findings of an engagement exercise with residents and stakeholders on these proposals. This was supported independently by Public Perspectives, specialists in public sector research and consultation since 2008.

Public Perspectives

Public Perspectives is a Market Research Society (MRS) company partner and member of the Social Research Association (the industry bodies in the UK) and holds Cyber Essentials certification.

The project was led and managed by Public Perspectives' Director of Research and Engagement, Mark Yeadon. Mark Yeadon has over 25 years of research, evaluation and consultation experience in the public and charitable sectors, including working for two local authorities and Central Government. Mark has a 1st class degree in Politics, a Masters (Distinction) in Applied Social and Market Research and is a RICS trained property and built environment surveyor (with a Masters in Real Estate at distinction from the University College of Estate Management). He is a full certified

member of the Market Research Society (CMRS) and a former trustee of the Social Research Association.

Public Perspectives had no prior professional, commercial or personal affiliation with Nottingham and Nottinghamshire or its partner councils. Public Perspectives has acted with independence and objectivity in the design, data collection, analysis and reporting of the engagement exercise and to reflect effectively the views of respondents.

Throughout this process, Public Perspectives has worked with the nominated project leads representing the council partners and through the agreed partner/LGR governance processes.

Methodology and clarification

This document is supplementary to the main report, published on the 1st October 2025, following requests of clarification from two councils.

Throughout the engagement process, interim headline findings were shared with partner councils on a weekly basis. A draft of the final report was made available to council partners on Tuesday 23rd September 2025 and subject to an initial review process involving representatives from all partner councils. This included a presentation to communication leads from each partner council on Wednesday 24th September 2025 and subsequent sharing of the draft report to the same group. A similar offer of a presentation was also made to Chief Executives, but the opportunity was not taken up. This document is produced in response to subsequent review and comments, following publication by council partners of the main report on Wednesday 1st October 2025.

The document provides further detail about the methodology, including examples of the analysis and selected comments/quotes from respondents to the engagement exercise, providing further detail and insight. It also includes clarity about some of the key findings.

The document should be read alongside the main report and also published alongside it or at least included as an appendix to the main report when submitted to Government as part of the final proposals.

The report authors ask that any readers refer directly to Public Perspectives where further clarity may be required about the findings of the engagement exercise.

Methodology

Context

- The engagement exercise was conducted over a six-week period ending on Sunday 14th September 2025.
- The aims of the engagement exercise established and agreed by council partners were:
 - Make it as easy as possible for residents to understand and share views.
 - Improve public awareness and understanding of LGR.
 - Gather public opinion and understand what's important to people [to shape future organisations].
 - Ensure representation across the geography.
 - Demonstrate to Government that criteria on engagement has been met.
- The main mechanism for capturing responses was an online questionnaire open to all interested parties, promoted through councils' websites, communication channels and promotional/marketing activity, including a dedicated website (lgrnotts.org), as well as outreach events and engagement with stakeholders.
- The questionnaire was also available in alternative formats on request, such as paper copies, alongside e-mail, phone, BSL and translation support.
- Relatedly, four focus groups were conducted involving 34 local residents reflecting the diversity of Nottinghamshire and organised by urban and rural areas. These focus groups allowed the emerging findings from the engagement process to be unpacked and views about the proposals to be discussed in-depth, both adding further insight as well as validating the findings from the engagement survey.
- In total, the engagement questionnaire received 11,483 responses.
- This level of response compares well to other similar exercises conducted in the region or across the country.

Key points to note

- This is an 'engagement' exercise. It is not a formal or statutory consultation or a referendum.
- The engagement exercise is not a representative sample research survey, as per the aims of the process established and agreed by all partner councils. It is designed to provide valuable information and insight. However, the findings should not be treated as conclusive as may be the case with a robust research survey. This includes the results not being suitable for statistical tests of significance, although notable differences between council areas or other demographics are likely to be meaningful.
- Whilst the findings of the engagement help shape proposals on the future of local councils in Nottinghamshire, they are to be considered alongside other information and evidence including detailed options appraisals about the viability and suitability of different options.
- This is not a one-off exercise. Engagement with key and strategic stakeholders preceded this engagement exercise and there is on-going engagement.
- The final proposals from councils must be submitted to Government by 28 November 2025, and feedback on how any proposal will be taken forward for Nottinghamshire is expected in 2026. This will then be subject to statutory consultation by Government.
- Alongside the focus groups, a number of the questions in the engagement questionnaire are open-ended text questions or qualitative in nature. This approach was agreed with all partner

councils. It was designed to capture comments and insight about the benefits and concerns relating to LGR, the proposals and options.

- Council partners requested the inclusion of open-ended questions, especially for options 1b and 1e, noting at the time the limitations of such question types. Whilst analysis of qualitative data is conducted robustly and independently, the findings should be treated as valuable insight and indicative rather than as conclusive, especially given the exercise was an engagement process rather than a research-based exercise.
- Responses to the engagement exercise were based on available and known information at the time. The engagement questionnaire was designed to have a stand-alone quality i.e. that respondents could answer it without reference to further information. This included brief descriptions and information about LGR, the proposals and options, including maps. In addition, respondents were encouraged to read further background information on the lgrnotts.org website, including the options appraisal and interim proposals submitted to Government in March 2025.
- The report authors ask that these points are noted by all parties when using the findings of the engagement exercise in developing proposals and in public statements or press releases. This is so that the findings are presented appropriately and not mis-represented.

Approach to quantitative data analysis

- Quantitative data captured through the questionnaire has been analysed using specialist survey software – SNAP XMP (www.snapsurveys.com). This is one of the longest established and widely used specialist survey software amongst the public sector and local authorities in the UK.
- Each quantitative question has been analysed and reported overall and by local council area. As is the nature with self-selecting/open-access questionnaires, the responses are not proportional to the population sizes in each of the local council areas. Consequently, the results are analysed and reported both as they are (i.e. non-weighted) and also re-weighted to be in-line with the population sizes in each local council area, given the importance of local council areas as building blocks in any future local government arrangement for Nottinghamshire.
- The quantitative data has also been analysed by other demographics such as sex, age, ethnicity, disability and housing status. Notable differences in responses related to these demographics are reported.

Approach to qualitative data analysis

- The open-ended comments from the engagement questionnaire and the focus groups have been subject to thematic analysis – an established and widely used qualitative analysis technique. This approach aims to systematically identify key themes from the data, alongside an indication of volume and strength of opinion, and presenting exemplifying quotes.
- This process is iterative and both manual and automated, included using AI tools, especially important given the volume of responses.
- It is also worth noting that whilst each individual qualitative/open-ended question is analysed specifically, the themes/findings are identified, contextualised and considered in light of all responses made by a respondent and those of other respondents. In other words, comments are not just analysed in isolation – the use of automated and AI software allows such holistic analysis to be conducted across a large data-set.

- The steps adopted are as follows:
 - Open-ended comments and focus group transcripts are initially reviewed manually by two researchers independently of one another. This provides an initial gauge of the parameters of the data and the key emerging themes.
 - The comments and transcripts are then subject to further analysis using specialist qualitative data analysis software. This is primarily NVivo 15 (www.lumivero.com/products/nvivo), which is one of the leading and longest established qualitative data analysis software. NVivo 15 also includes in-built AI to assist in identifying key themes.
 - This begins with sentiment analysis to assess the levels of positive, neutral/mixed and negative responses.
 - This is then followed by further thematic analysis, identifying and describing key themes, as well as volume/strength of opinion, relationships between themes and relationships with other variables such as demographics. It also allows for the organisation of the data into these key themes and therefore identification of key quotes to exemplify the themes.
 - This work is predominantly conducted by a lead researcher with a second researcher reviewing the analysis and associated key themes/findings and acting as a critical friend.
 - In addition, as a final sense-check, anonymised data is interrogated through open-source AI platforms (such as Microsoft Copilot and ChatGPT 5).
- The themes and findings are presented including approximated percentages/numbers of respondents (rounded up or down). This is reasonable given that the qualitative comments were made as part of a questionnaire and there have been thousands of such responses (i.e. there is a large sample rather than just a few respondents). This is to help provide an indication of relative importance of the themes/findings. These should be treated as such (i.e. approximations) rather than conclusive percentages, given the qualitative nature of the data. Further quantification beyond key themes is resisted to avoid 'over-quantification' of qualitative data, which is methodologically not good practice.
- Summaries of thematic analysis and a selection of exemplifying quotes for options 1b and 1e have been made available to council partners. These are provided as examples of the method and to provide further detail and insight. Please note that these are only summaries reflecting the final output of a thematic analysis. The actual thematic analysis is more detailed and essentially a working document/process with detail and notes held within the qualitative data analysis software and on paper.

Clarification of key findings relating to options 1b and 1e

- The engagement questionnaire included open-ended questions relating to options 1b and 1e – two short-listed options following the options appraisal process included in interim proposals to Government in March 2025:
 - Option 1b is: Nottinghamshire and Nottingham City + Broxtowe + Gedling (known as Option 1b). This option is two new unitary councils, one covering Bassetlaw, Mansfield, Newark and Sherwood, Ashfield, and Rushcliffe. The second covering Gedling, Broxtowe, and Nottingham City.
 - Option 1e is: Two new unitary councils, one covering Bassetlaw, Mansfield, Newark and Sherwood, Ashfield, and Gedling. The second covering Broxtowe, Nottingham City, and Rushcliffe.
- Some council partners have asked for further clarity about these findings and their communication within the main report. Findings relating specifically to these two options can be found at paragraphs 26 to 29 inclusive in the Executive Summary and 6.10 to 6.18 inclusive in the main body of the report (pages 43 to 46 inclusive).
- The specific findings in the main report relating to these options should be read alongside wider findings relating to other questions asked in the engagement exercise, including perceptions about the effectiveness of the current structure of local councils, views about local government reorganisation in general, and responses about the proposal to replace the nine existing councils with two councils to run local government across Nottingham and Nottinghamshire. Not only are these findings relevant for each option, respondents themselves sometimes referred back to points previously made and commented on each option in light of their responses to other questions.
- Likewise, the report authors are keen that the detail related to options 1b and 1e does not distract from key findings and concerns relating to these options and the approach/design of any new councils. This is so that any future configuration of options and the subsequent councils reflect the concerns and expectations of respondents. This includes focusing on delivering good quality core and universal services/issues, alongside value for money and meeting local needs. Relatedly, respondents highlighted the importance of involving residents in decision-making and local area/neighbourhood working. This includes understanding local issues and priorities and tailoring services and support to different communities (both equality groups, different localities and urban-rural communities) as part of any future arrangements.
- Please also note points made earlier about the methodology, analysis of qualitative data and use of approximated percentages to indicate relative importance of key themes/findings.
- At the risk of being reductionist and the danger of re-writing a published report that could lead to differing interpretation, below is a bullet-point summary of the headline findings relating to options 1b and 1e. These are presented in such a way to reduce the risk of misinterpretation based on the reader's background or sentiment towards either of the options. This clarification should be used positively to increase understanding and insight, and not used to undermine the main report:
 - The majority of respondents had concerns about both options 1b and 1e.
 - The nature of many of these concerns are similar for each option to lesser or greater degrees. These include:

- concerns about the inclusion and exclusion of surrounding areas of Nottingham City i.e. boundary concerns;
 - being included in a council with Nottingham City that could inherit some of the perceived issues experienced by the city and its council; and
 - rural areas being dominated by the city including lack of rural voice, representation and inappropriate services to meet local need.
- Regarding boundary concerns and specifically option 1b, approximately half of respondents raised concerns that the proposed boundaries are illogical or unfair with the exclusion of some neighbouring areas such as West Bridgford in Rushcliffe Borough Council and some areas close to the city in Ashfield District Council, which are seen as integral to Nottingham's urban area. At the same time, the council covering Nottingham City is considered too large in scope, bringing in areas that do not align in terms of identity, characteristics, and access to services with the city, including rural areas.
 - Regarding 1e, concerns were also raised about boundaries with some respondents stating that the option excluded locations surrounding the city in council areas including Gedling Borough Council and Ashfield District Council area. Similarly, there were specific concerns about joining outlying rural and other areas to the city that have little to no relationship with it.
 - Despite concerns, approximately a third of respondents either explicitly supported option 1e or said they preferred it compared to option 1b as the best of the two options or least worst option (approximately half of this third explicitly supported the option and the other half were positive towards it in the context of comparing it against option 1b). This support or positivity to option 1e was often due to respondents stating that they considered 1e to be more geographically coherent and/or is a cleaner North-South split with a better division of populations and resources. That said, some support/positivity (about half of those that supported 1e) was caveated by continued concerns around boundaries or urban-rural imbalance and/or conditional upon benefits being realised.
 - This compares to approximately a tenth of respondents that explicitly supported option 1b. This is because they believe it is the most suitable option in terms of geography with Nottingham City at the heart of the new council and combining areas with common links (and a wider county-wide council drawing in other parts of Nottinghamshire). As with option 1e, support for 1b was often cited on the condition of realising the benefits of LGR.
- In short, with both options notable concerns exist and dominate the responses i.e. a majority of respondents have concerns about either or both of the options, including concerns about LGR in general. Option 1e does receive greater positivity and support than option 1b based on qualitative comments, but this is from a minority of respondents, in some cases is a preference rather than outright support, and with both options positivity/support is sometimes caveated by concerns or conditional on achieving the potential benefits of LGR and/or minimising disruption to residents and services.
 - It is also helpful to note that respondents tended to consider and respond to questions about options 1b and 1e collectively. Consequently, many of the points are common across both options and respondents compared and contrasted each option, which in part accounts for the marginal preference for option 1e over 1b by a minority of respondents.
 - The report authors ask that all parties seek to utilise these findings in a constructive way to inform their final proposals and that findings are used appropriately and not misrepresented in proposals and in public statements or press releases.