

Community Governance Review Team

Electoral Services
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BY EMAIL

14th July 2025

Dear Community Governance Review Team,

Consultation Response from the Shropshire Association of Local Councils (SALC) on Telford & Wrekin Council's Community Governance Review 2025

The Shropshire Association of Local Councils (SALC) welcomes the opportunity to respond to Telford & Wrekin Council's Community Governance Review (CGR) 2025, as outlined in the published [Terms of Reference and Information Pack \[1\]](#).

We recognise the importance of ensuring that community governance arrangements across the borough are reflective of local identities, provide effective and convenient local governance, and support community cohesion. SALC supports the principle of regular reviews to ensure governance structures remain fit for purpose, particularly in areas experiencing demographic or developmental change.

Key Points of Response:

1. Engagement and Awareness

SALC notes the Council's intention to improve engagement following feedback from the 2024 review. We strongly support the two-phase consultation approach and encourage the Council to ensure that all parish and town councils are fully informed and supported throughout the process. Clear, accessible communication and early engagement are essential to ensure meaningful participation.

2. Representation and Warding

We welcome the review of councillor numbers and warding arrangements. However, we urge the Council to consider the unique characteristics of each parish and avoid a one-size-fits-all approach. Local knowledge and community identity must be central to any proposed changes.

3. Timing and Implementation

The proposed timeline, concluding before summer 2025 with changes effective from

May 2027, is appropriate. However, we recommend that any significant changes be accompanied by transitional support and guidance for affected councils.

4. **Support for Status Quo**

SALC echoes the Council's reminder that those who support existing arrangements should also make their views known. We encourage all member councils to participate in both consultation phases, regardless of whether they seek change.

5. **Future Collaboration**

SALC remains committed to working collaboratively with Telford & Wrekin Council to ensure that the outcomes of the CGR reflect the needs and aspirations of local communities. We are available to assist in facilitating dialogue and supporting our member councils throughout the review process.

We appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this important review and look forward to continued engagement.

We also appreciate the opportunity to engage with the Council as part of the process and for the support of Officers and Members have given to enable this. However, we have significant concerns about aspects of the current proposals.

Concerns Regarding Parish Council Mergers

SALC is concerned by proposals that involve the **merger of existing parish councils**, particularly where such changes may lead to:

- **Loss of local identity:** Smaller parishes often have distinct histories, cultures, and priorities. Merging them into larger administrative units risks eroding this identity and weakening the connection between residents and their local representatives.
- **Reduced democratic representation:** Larger councils may struggle to maintain the same level of responsiveness and accessibility that smaller, more localised councils can offer.
- **Insufficient community support:** We urge the Council to ensure that any proposed mergers are based on clear evidence of community backing, not just administrative convenience.

SALC is concerned by the proposal to **abolish Dawley Hamlets Parish Council**. We believe this proposal raises several serious issues:

1. **Loss of Local Identity**

Dawley Hamlets has a distinct historical and community identity, with its own traditions, priorities, and sense of place. Merging it into a larger town council risks diluting this identity and undermining the principle of localism.

2. **Democratic Representation**

Smaller parish councils like Dawley Hamlets provide residents with direct access to their elected representatives. A merger could reduce the visibility and accessibility of councillors, particularly in more rural or peripheral areas.

3. Community Engagement and Accountability

Local councils are most effective when they are close to the communities they serve. Dawley Hamlets Parish Council has demonstrated strong community engagement and responsiveness. Abolishing it could weaken local accountability and reduce opportunities for residents to influence decisions that affect them.

4. Public Consultation and Transparency

We are concerned that the rationale for this merger has not been clearly communicated to residents. It is vital that any proposal to abolish a parish council is based on robust evidence and widespread community support—neither of which appears to be present in this case.

5. Precedent and Wider Implications

The abolition of a functioning and engaged parish council sets a troubling precedent. It may discourage civic participation and raise fears among other small councils about their long-term viability.

SALC urges Telford & Wrekin Council to:

- Reconsider this proposal in light of the community's distinct identity and governance needs.
- Ensure that any structural changes are supported by clear evidence and meaningful public consultation.
- Uphold the principle that local governance should be as close to the people as possible.

Based on community response, SALC also shares concern about the proposal to merge Hollinswood & Randlay with Stirchley & Brookside to create The Nedge. It appears from the consultation there is overwhelming support to retain the current arrangements.

Hollinswood & Randlay Parish Council strongly opposes the proposed merger with Stirchley & Brookside Parish Council, citing overwhelming local opposition (99.5% in their parish and 76.9% in Stirchley & Brookside). The Council argues that the merger would create an oversized, disconnected parish lacking shared identity, cohesion, or practical governance benefits. Residents fear losing their community identity, especially under the proposed name "The Nedge," which it feels does not reflect local heritage or character.

The Council criticizes the consultation process for lacking alternative options, insufficient direct engagement with key stakeholders, and failing to meet the criteria outlined in the 2010 guidance on community governance. It argues the proposal contradicts principles of effective, convenient, and representative local governance, and would reduce democratic accountability by cutting councillor numbers. The Council also disputes claims of shared infrastructure, noting the A442 is not a meaningful community link.

Instead, the Council supports minor boundary adjustments to address anomalies but reject wholesale restructuring. They emphasize their positive relationship with Telford & Wrekin

Council and express willingness to collaborate on sensible changes. However, it firmly opposes the current merger proposal, asserting it lacks justification, community support, and alignment with statutory guidance.

SALC urges the BRC to reconsider this proposal in light of the distinct identity and governance needs of these communities and to accept there is little evidence or support for the current proposal, which will also reduce democratic accountability.

The Government's guidance (2010) is clear that **abolition or merger of parishes should not be undertaken unless clearly justified** and supported by sustained local consensus (paras. 117–124). We are not aware that such justification has been demonstrated in the current proposals.

Support for the Creation of New Parishes

Conversely, SALC welcomes proposals that seek to **create new parish councils** in areas that are currently unparished or where communities have expressed a desire for more localised governance.

We believe that:

- **New parishes empower communities:** Establishing new councils gives residents a stronger voice in local affairs and fosters civic engagement.
- **Local governance should grow with communities:** As Telford & Wrekin continues to develop, especially in areas of new housing and population growth, new parishes can help ensure that governance structures keep pace with change.
- **Community identity is strengthened:** New parishes allow emerging communities to define their own priorities and shape their future.

The Government's guidance supports this approach, stating that the creation of new parishes is a key tool for **community empowerment** and **local democratic engagement** (paras. 12–14, 45–47).

Impact on Rural Parishes

SALC is particularly concerned about the potential impact of the proposals on **rural parishes**, which often have:

- **Long-standing historical identities**
- **Distinct community needs**
- **Limited capacity to absorb structural changes without losing representation**

The guidance (para. 125) recognises that **90% of England's land area is covered by parishes**, most of which are rural. It stresses that changes should not upset historic traditions and should reflect genuine shifts in community identity. Proposals that centralise governance or reduce the number of rural councils risk undermining the **principle of subsidiarity** and the **vital role rural parishes play in community cohesion and service delivery**.

Examples of rural parish concerns include:

- **Wrockwardine Parish:** A historically rural parish with a strong sense of identity and active community engagement. Proposals that might merge it with more urbanised areas could dilute its rural character and reduce the effectiveness of local representation.
- **Ercall Magna Parish:** Covering a large rural area with dispersed settlements, Ercall Magna relies on its parish council to maintain local services and represent its unique needs. A merger could centralise decision-making and make it harder for residents in outlying hamlets to have their voices heard. The Parish Council strongly opposes the proposed merger with Waters Upton Parish, arguing it would reduce effective governance, weaken community representation, and offer no clear benefits. EMPC highlights that the proposal lacks justification, background, or evidence of deficiencies in current arrangements. The council emphasizes its strong governance, financial health, and community engagement, including a full complement of councillors and a history of successful local projects. EMPC asserts that Ercall Magna and Waters Upton have distinct identities, facilities, and community interests, and that merging them would dilute representation and potentially disenfranchise residents due to increased travel distances.

The council also criticizes the proposed reduction in councillor numbers and the unequal warding structure, which it argues violates Local Government Boundary Commission guidance. EMPC recommends no changes to parish boundaries or identities but supports internal reform by reducing its councillors from 13 to 10 across three wards—Ellerdine, High Ercall, and Roden—based on population and geography. This structure would maintain effective representation and align with community identity. EMPC urges the Boundary Review Committee to respect local opinion and adopt its proposed warding adjustments instead of pursuing an unwanted and unjustified merger.

- **Edgmond Parish:** Edgmond has a long-established identity since the 1600s, supported by its architectural diversity and the Edgmond Conservation Area created in 1981, and its parish records date back to 1898, emphasizing its distinct community history.

The Edgmond Neighbourhood Plan referendum in 2018 had a high turnout of 45.2% with 94.2% voting in favour, exceeding average neighbourhood plan participation rates which is indicating strong local cohesion and engagement. Chetwynd does not have a NP, leading to governance anomalies until 2028.

A 2025 housing needs survey finalised this month focused solely on Edgmond, showing 23.4% community participation, further differentiating it from Chetwynd and complicating unified planning responses post-merger.

Besides transportation routes and some local landmarks, Edgmond shares few common elements with Chetwynd. The parish of Edgmond has no shared history or commonalities that link the two parishes.

Merger would enlarge the parish and at the same time reduce the number of councillors, which ultimately would reduce the effectiveness of the ability to engage with residents.

- **Waters Upton Parish:** Waters Upton Parish Council strongly opposes the proposed merger with Ercall Magna Parish, citing a lack of shared services, facilities, or community identity. Although the two parishes share a boundary, they operate independently with separate schools, churches, village halls, shops, and Neighbourhood Plans. The Council emphasizes its strong community cohesion, demonstrated through successful fundraising and development projects like the Parish Centre and Village Green, achieved without increasing the precept.

The Council argues that the proposed merger would create an unmanageably large and dispersed parish, undermining effective and convenient governance. It also criticizes the suggested reduction in councillor numbers, noting that rural representation requires more councillors due to geographic spread. The proposed warding, which allocates fewer councillors to Waters Upton than to High Ercall, is seen as undemocratic and unfair.

Local engagement has shown no support for the merger, with residents expressing concerns and opposition. The Council appreciates the additional consultation event but highlights difficulties faced by residents in accessing and completing the online survey. They urge the Boundary Review Committee to respect local opinion and maintain the status quo, suggesting that a future review in 10–15 years may be more appropriate if circumstances change.

- **Tibberton & Cherrington Parish:** A small but active rural parish that has expressed concern about being grouped with larger, more urbanised neighbours. Residents fear that their priorities—such as rural transport, agricultural land use, and conservation—may be overlooked.
- **Little Wenlock:** Little Wenlock Parish Council firmly opposes the proposed changes in the Community Governance Review, citing unanimous resident opposition. A Phase Two survey showed 100% of respondents rejected the merger, reaffirming strong community identity and preference for remaining an independent parish. The Council warns that the proposed changes would degrade local services and erode community cohesion. Councillors expressed deep concern, stating they would resign if the merger proceeds against residents' wishes. The Council urges Telford & Wrekin to respect the clear and consistent feedback from both surveys and uphold the community's desire to remain self-governed.
- **Eyton:** Eyton Parish Meeting strongly opposes the proposal to merge with a new Weald Moors Parish Council, citing a lack of community cohesion with neighbouring parishes. Eyton values its distinct rural identity, active volunteer-led governance, and historical heritage. Residents fear being disenfranchised and losing influence, especially regarding local developments like Wappenshall SUE. The Parish argues that the draft

proposal misrepresents community dynamics and lacks local support, as shown in Phase One feedback. They advocate retaining current arrangements, aligning with Boundary Commission guidance that governance should reflect community identity, be effective, and avoid artificially large groupings that dilute local representation.

- **Kynnersley:** Kynnersley Parish Council opposes the proposed merger with Eyton and Preston into a new Weald Moors Parish Council, citing a lack of shared identity or connections with Eyton. While some residents see potential benefits in merging with Preston alone, the majority prefer maintaining the current arrangement. A local consultation showed overwhelming opposition to the three-way merger. The Council criticizes the consultation process as misleading and poorly executed and stresses the need for equal representation if any merger occurs. They urge the Boundary Review Committee to prioritize residents' views, as required by guidance, and reject imposed, top-down restructuring.

Compliance with Government Guidance

SALC has reviewed the proposals in light of the Government's official **Guidance on Community Governance Reviews (2010)** and notes the following:

- **Identity and Interests of Local Communities:** The guidance (para. 52) requires that governance arrangements reflect local identities. Mergers that dilute distinct community identities may not meet this test.
- **Effective and Convenient Local Government:** The guidance (para. 62) emphasises accessibility and responsiveness. Larger, merged councils may struggle to deliver this, especially in rural or dispersed areas.
- **Community Cohesion:** The guidance (paras. 67–75) links governance to cohesion. Proposals that are perceived as top-down or that remove local representation may damage trust and cohesion.
- **Abolition of Parishes:** The guidance (paras. 117–124) makes clear that abolition should be exceptional, justified by strong evidence, and supported by sustained local consensus.
- **Rural Sensitivity:** The guidance (paras. 125–127) stresses the importance of preserving rural identity and ensuring that changes do not disrupt long-standing governance structures without compelling reason.

Final Remarks

SALC urges Telford & Wrekin Council to:

- Reconsider any proposals to abolish or merge parish councils without clear and sustained community support.

- Ensure that all proposals are demonstrably aligned with the statutory criteria and Government guidance.
- Continue to support the creation of new parishes where there is local demand and evidence of community identity.
- Engage rural communities with sensitivity and respect for their unique governance needs.

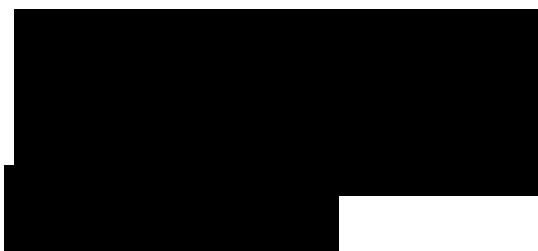
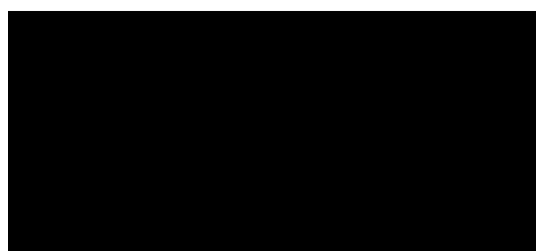
SALC is also concerned in the overall reduction in number of parish and town councils across the Borough. A reduction in the number of Councils and Councillors need not necessarily lead to effective and convenient local government and will lead to a democratic deficit. Any changes as per the above should reflect community identity, cohesion and be supported locally.

Following a meeting in June of Wrekin Area Committee and with representatives of Telford & Wrekin Council, SALC submitted a number of questions regarding the review which as yet have still to be answered.

We remain available to support both existing and emerging councils throughout this process and to advocate for governance arrangements that reflect the needs and aspirations of local communities across the Borough.

Thank you for the opportunity to engage with and support the process. We look forward to the response to the consultation and that the final decisions will reflect the concerns, needs and aspirations of all the communities across Telford & Wrekin.

Yours Sincerely

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