

West Midlands Combined Authority – September 2015

Survey Response

The public of Redditch were surveyed during the period 14 September 2015 through to 27 September 2015:

‘Combined’ authority survey

You may be aware that the Government is offering to devolve some of its powers to regional groups of councils that have agreed to work together and form a ‘combined authority’.

Currently the Government takes most of the wider decisions that affect more than a single council area, in consultation with the councils of those areas.

In a combined authority some of those wider decisions could be made by the combined authority itself, instead of by the Government.

In the West Midlands, a combined authority has been proposed and if put in place it may start making wider decisions on some key strategic functions that cross geographical council boundaries. Examples may include transport, regeneration and skills.

Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull, Walsall and Wolverhampton have all indicated that they could join the proposed West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA).

Combined authorities don’t replace councils, or reduce existing local sovereignty. They are the mechanism by which the Government will consider devolving these powers.

The council’s position on the WMCA is set to be discussed at a special council meeting on Thursday 8 October. Before then, we would like to hear whether or not you support the idea of our area joining a combined authority, and why.

The survey was made available on the council’s website, in paper format in council buildings and disseminated to community groups. A press release was issued promoting the survey in the local press and social media was utilised.

There were a total of 90 responses to the survey received by the closing date.
Yes – 40 (44%) No – 44 (49%) Don’t know – 6 (7%)

There were two additional responses received which haven’t been included as they arrived 36 hours after the closing date.

87 (97%) of the respondents were residents of Redditch.

Survey responses have been grouped by theme.

The main themes from ‘yes’ respondents:

Theme	*No.
Local decision making/greater say/devolved power	14
Commonality with West Midlands	9
Good/better transport links	8
Benefits of pooling resources	7
Will benefit/help development of Redditch	7
Good for business/jobs/skills	4
Don't want to miss out	2

*This does not add up to 40 as some respondents provided more than one reason

In addition to the above themes, concerns were also raised regarding the cost of this style of government, particularly given the financial starting point of some of the other council's involved; checks and balances would need to be put in place.

There were also concerns around Redditch being a small partner and as such may not benefit to the same extent as the city councils. Others also felt that respect should be paid to an individual area and its culture.

Although some respondents said yes, there was still a wish for more information and that the town should 'go with the best option' whether that was with the West Midlands or not; that we don't miss out on the opportunity to be involved.

Other concerns raised by respondents related to the possible complexity of decision making, accountability and potential loss of jobs.

The main themes from the ‘no’ respondents:

Theme	*No.
Loss of influence/voice/decision making powers	11
Potential reduction of funding and services for Redditch	8
Nothing in common/different issues to West Midlands	5
Concern about financial position of other council's	4
Prefer other options i.e. Worcestershire/N. Worcestershire	4
Undemocratic/too bureaucratic	4
Loss of identity	4
Expensive/increase in costs	3
Potential loss of jobs	1
No benefit to the town	1

*This does not add up to 44 as some respondents provided more than one reason

There were also 6 respondents who said 'don't know'. The main reason for this was they felt more information was required before they could make an informed decision. Other comments from these respondents were that Redditch had 'nothing in common with a big city' and concerns over reduced funding and services for Redditch, and also a concern over which other authorities were involved.

Other comments

Throughout the analysis of the comments, concerns over access to health services were quite apparent. For example: 'Could also sort out the problems with the Alex Hospital and join with the QE Trust ...' and '... hopefully also merge the hospital with Birmingham ...'.

In addition there appears to be an underlying feeling for some respondents that Redditch is sometimes the 'poor relation' in Worcestershire.

Although there is a positivity regarding links with Birmingham, there is very little, if any reference to the other cities currently involved with the WMCA. Also concern has been raised regarding the possible expansion of the combined authority; 'how long until the scope of these combined authorities extends beyond transport, regeneration and skills'.

Full responses can be seen in Appendix A

Tracy Beech
Policy Officer
29 September 2015

Comments received by those who responded 'yes' to the survey:

Makes sense pooling resources possible see benefits in transport
I believe that decisions affecting residents should be made as close to the person as possible. This would go some way to bringing some devolution to the region. If it costs more and makes decision-making more complex then I would be less enthusiastic.
As Government continues to reduce funding to councils then any scheme that allows us to continue to provide the services to our community it will also allow us to tap into schemes we could never achieve on our own. With several large authorities working together we will surely miss out if we try to go on our own.
I think for Redditch to join a combined authority with the proposed (WMCA) is an excellent proposition to help improve the town. This would mean Redditch would probably have access to Birmingham hospitals thereby gaining much better links by road train and bus to attend appointments rather than the farcical problems getting to Worcester. Worcestershire on the whole is a rural environment mainly concerned in farming and small market towns in most cases with little connection to large manufacturing industry. Redditch on the other hand is mostly an urban environment based on manufacturing and supplying parts and components to large industries such as car manufacturers the aviation industry medical supplies such as needles etc and many more such our famous Redditch springs so is therefore more suited to be linked with the urban city environment of Birmingham and the greater West Midland conurbation. I believe the (WMCA) would give the town and its Council better access to funding and new schemes to make improvements for the town and its citizens
Being part of a bigger combined authority would give us a greater say in issues
Redditch is closely linked with Birmingham through industry transport and business and would benefit from joint planning and investment in the new region
Might improve a bit better on upgrading properties and more work done on communal buildings and get more transport to interlink with dial a ride instead of us keep getting trips cancelled due to lack of there buses breaking down.
It will be good for the borough. Job opportunities will increase. Skill gap will lessen. Good for local business and Kingfisher.
Economic and transport links lie with Birmingham rather than other County towns. Road and rail routes lead to Birmingham travel to work routes are to/from Birmingham the jobs in Redditch relate to the economy of the West Midlands education provision draws students from Redditch to Birmingham and the health care provision draws patients there. Although Redditch would wish to retain its separate County identity the development and investment potential to improve the economy and facilities in Redditch is greater from the West Midlands than from Worcestershire. The prospect of sharing with the Centro transport network the advantages of its bus provision and rail fare regime cohesive development of industry investment and job opportunities and alliance with the health provision of Birmingham are decisive motivators.
At the moment Redditch is easily swamped in a county where the majority have quite different considerations than the town and people of Redditch. Membership of a group in touch with the needs of Redditch will help the town to prosper.
Clearly there will be better external representation for the 'Midlands Engine' to Government and also for marketing the area (UK and internationally) with single points of contact. As an internal economy better economies of scale scope (eg infrastructure) and need could be developed instead of silo working. Checks and balances need to be put in to ensure that this is not another massive hierarchy.
I'm all for development of Redditch and joining as one i imagine will help. However I'm a little concerned if there's a potential loss of jobs.
yes I would support a combined authority it will enhance the skills employment and prosperity for people in Redditch.
I feel that it would bring jobs to the town. It would also be a bonus for the town to join Centro cheaper fares etc. Also the majority of the town's inhabitants look towards Birmingham and not Worcester.
Whilst this seems a good idea to strengthen the position of the Borough assurance would be needed that the bigger authorities would not swallow up our services meaning job losses for Redditch.
The combined authority would have a bigger budget altogether as the central government has promised more funds to be shared. Not being part of it means to be relegated and left out of any future developments for the West Midlands
Further joined up working with neighbouring authorities which has worked well with Bromsgrove. Chance to share experiences/ best practice from larger councils possibly access more funding streams etc. Improved network links with the city of Birmingham.
Wider range of facilities for both Redditch and Bromsgrove residents helps communities to start to work together

Comments received by those who responded 'yes' to the survey (cont):

We can start making better decisions for us as a Town and whats best for us and neighbouring towns.
I think it would provide more opportunity for town regeneration. It would also provide more access to service provisions across the region. I am concerned that Birmingham's financial deficit will lead to the funnelling of a disproportionate amount of services and funds their way I'm not sure how balanced it will be
It would be a good idea for us to have more power locally but whether we go with this combined authority for West Midlands or a plan comes to the table for Worcestershire I cannot say. It will really depend on what plans come forward and what really is best for the borough.
Support the greater Birmingham option not the Worcestershire option it would be the end of our town
It is better for the communities that some decisions are made locally as decision making in local areas are more relevant and according to public needs
Local solutions to local problems will be best served by local authorities with local knowledge local members and local sympathies
The opportunity to join the West Midlands combined authority is not to be missed; huge investment in business & health services would come to the town
Because it may lead to better funding for schools and services and hopefully proper links with the QE hospital trust. We are closer to Bham than Worcester with better communication links. We have an urban feel rather than county feel of rest of County
I think there is a better need for co-ordination of transport and planning with the West Midlands rather than with the county Council at Worcester who only look at investment in the southern part of the County Council area. Could also sort out the problems with the Alex Hospital and join with the QE Trust rather than propping up the Worcester Royal PFI
Economy of scale would give Redditch more spending power, more choice, shared transport, access to good health services, better infrastructure and a powerful council. It would broaden the cultural life of Redditch and extend educational choice for children and adults. It would improve quality of life. The combined authority should however respect each area and its culture. I mention this because that is NOT the case in Redditch's position vis a vis Worcestershire CC.
Better services and hopefully also merge the hospital with Birmingham also. The bus service in Redditch is abysmal and getting to Worcester hospital is a nightmare. Buses in general are appalling. I think we would get better services overall and more say in what happens in our local area. I believe its the way forward
The train line goes from Redditch to Birmingham; the roads mostly up to Birmingham; the town was expanded to accommodate Birmingham. The flow of people for work or leisure is mostly between Redditch and Birmingham. Redditch should be proud of its West Midlands connections and work to be a strong partner. Better to be a small part of something big than a small part of something small.
I am very much in favour of joining the WMCA as Redditch has always been close to Birmingham both in distance and philosophy. We are a small West Midland industrial town and have always had Redditch people working in Birmingham and the converse We have good transport links we have a large number of Birmingham people living in the town we have ease of access to the QE hospital Symphony Hall Birmingham Rep the Hippodrome Theatre the Art Gallery and Museum etc. I have always felt much closer to Birmingham (I was born in Redditch in 1943) than Worcestershire as the county does not understand and has largely ignored the people of Redditch. Worcestershire is run for the benefit of Worcester and its local area and they have no interest in the north of the county.
I think a combined council is a good idea. It would mean that local authorities would be working together to make decisions based on the needs of their communities rather than the government who would have a broader focus on the issues that are raised.
Because we are always classed as Worcestershire's poor relation.
It would enable a more strategic approach to issues that need to be addressed on a regional basis whilst retaining local democratic accountability. Devolution of powers from the Government would lead to better decision making for the region as a whole. The current centralised control of virtually everything under civil servants in Whitehall leads to an over-investment in the south east to the detriment of the rest of the country and a very unbalanced economy.
At this moment in time the County of Redditch has very little in common with South Worcestershire who I believe do not understand what the larger industrial based conurbation areas require in the way of support for new industries and the enhancement of higher technical knowledge to support micro enterprises and new generations of entrepreneurs.
I believe that more decisions affecting local people should be made by people living and working near to those people rather than those at Westminster.
I identify with the Metropolitan/urban area far more than with rural Worcestershire. Redditch looks north far more than towards Worcester. It's prime/direct communications all run this way. This proposal therefore does not cause fear or alarm.. It offers more devolution in Redditch's better interests. The sooner we can focus on any Birmingham-centric approaches; the better we can defuse Worcestershire's attempts towards pro-rural identity & arguments/interests.
The combined authority could press for the same level of funding as the Northern Powerhouses i.e. Greater Manchester and Leeds

Comments received by those who responded 'no' to the survey:

I would not be comfortable with the council being combined with Birmingham as it is currently under dire financial strain and I feel we may be 'dragged under' by them.
I believe that if we join a combined authority we should be looking within the Worcestershire/Herefordshire area not Birmingham/Black Country.
Because I don't like the idea of becoming part of Birmingham which is a disgrace of a city.
No to Birmingham we should stay in Worcestershire
Definitely NOT as this would undoubtedly divert funds and services away from Redditch.
because it is the EU plans to have regional government and as i do not want to be in the EU as it is undemocratic I am against it
Moved here to get away from Birmingham don't want to be part of a failing council
Just as the coalition government didn't work well with party's losing out I cannot see this working in each councils favour
I'm concerned about the reduction in local jobs a combined authority would cause.
Redditch and Bromsgrove should not join the WMCA as the character of our local area will be lost. It seems likely that WMCA would dominate which could lead to Redditch being super urbanised. I have no objections to the possibility of a Worcestershire combined authority subject to terms. Redditch should continue to recognise its rural association. NO to WMCA.
Birmingham was near to bankruptcy not so long ago (ind. rep.) and are still in dire straits. They would bleed us dry and use adjacent Councils as a cash source. We would NOT benefit at all. This is a big con!
This will/may affect care implemented
You're asking the people of Redditch to make a decision without giving them any information! Just "Examples MAY include"!? I have to vote no because you've given no indication how this benefits Redditch. And it smacks very much of once we're in the WMCA the Electoral commission will decide Redditch is now part of the West Midlands and change the boundaries. Again!
Birmingham can't get their own house in order why would we trust them with our money
Very often bigger authorities don't perform so well. Bromsgrove is more prosperous than Redditch and would have more clout.
I left Birmingham 39 years ago to live in Redditch a lovely rural town. As the years have gone by it is becoming a satellite of Birmingham. Please don't let it take over. Let us remain free from Birmingham.
History tells us Bigger is not Better. It becomes top heavy with people trying to make a name for themselves whatever the cost. 'Forward?'; Birmingham are mainly still using Black Bags instead of Wheelie Bins how forward looking. Proposed amalgamation of West Mercia & Warwickshire Police Redditch residents mainly against it proposal dropped so the fudge was to call it an alliance so all Chief Constable's and two PCC'S and their Entourage stay in place. Combined!! Just an increase in cost's with no benefit. Look how much the EU cost's
It's bad enough to get service as it is it be more difficult to reach in higher authority it will be better if we stay locally
Don't want to be part of Birmingham
There is insufficient information at this point to know what benefits / pitfalls there would be for a small council like Redditch. All the other players in the proposed West Midlands Combined Authority are large cities. It is my thinking that the voice of Redditch would be lost and very little heed paid to the wants and needs of a small town. Redditch is already the poor relation in Worcestershire; its voice would be totally lost against the others who are currently signed up to the WMCA. How long until the scope of these combined authorities extend beyond transport regeneration and skills? I don't think this is right for Redditch to join; I think we should wait and see how the WMCA functions before jumping in.
I don't think it's right that Redditch passes control of parts of its infrastructure to Birmingham or this Authority. I believe it a better prospect for the town if our councillors develop some grit and seek their own combined authority offering to share the new powers with Bromsgrove, Kidderminster, Studley and any other surrounding councils who might be interested. This would our chance to do something different for or local area and for the first time give us a stronger say in our future.
Worcestershire is very a different place to Sandwell Dudley etc and faces very different issues.
Redditch will not get its fair share of funding. Most funding will be allocated to central Birmingham and it's immediate neighbouring areas
Another layer of bureaucracy. Expensive unelected and unaccountable. No thanks
I feel that our local authority will lose its own voice on issues that directly relate to Redditch. Bigger does not necessarily mean better.

Comments received by those who responded 'no' to the survey (cont):

Do not want to be lumped in with Birmingham etc getting fed up with people making decisions about our town. We are Redditch not Bromsgrove, Birmingham etc and we are part of Worcestershire and I would like us to stay that way!!
I don't believe it would benefit Redditch at all. Redditch is a small authority with quite a big population who in general receive a great service from the council by joint a combined authority especially including Birmingham I feel Redditch will not be considered a priority over the large cities and towns who are already failing to provide adequately for their residents. It will may mean our elected councillors may not have the same influence on local issues for the townspeople Redditch
If Redditch is already being named as a potential location for Birmingham housing growth imagine the lack of control this Council would have over the decision making that going to be needed for this matter. The Council needs to remain independent to be able to influence this important process. It is terrible timing to be considering this option. Getting together to combine decision making on such wide scale matters like development and transport decisions would reduce the decision making authority of the Council. Where would the local accountability be?
RBC is doing a good job without cash-strapped Birmingham and the Black Country dragging it down. We are combined with BDC - no more!
Local matters should be decided locally would NOT want to be part of West Midlands combined authority for others to decide our policies and misuse our budgets
So many questions how will the voice and needs of Redditch residents be heard and really listened to? A combined authority could mean savings in purchase of services across all authorities but would these suit all local councils to deliver for local needs. What service cuts and provision would there be for local communities?
Because it is important to keep our independence and have a clearer view of what matters in our area due to our size we will get side lined
Unless it replaces something it will cost more money. That means taxpayers money! Therefore I don't agree! But it will probably go ahead anyway!
I do not want to be part of Birmingham why should we pay for the privilege of not having a vote There's nothing in it for Redditch

Comments received by those who responded 'don't know' to the survey:

Far more detail is needed before any sensible person can come to a decision on this!
How can one give an opinion in the current situation when there is such a lack of information? The public deserve to see fully costed worked through proposals describing the pros and cons.
I cannot say yes or no because I have not read enough or know how this will impact on Redditch in a positive or negative way therefore I cannot make an informed decision yet.
Need more information on both the for and against - in principle if it means more local funding and more control for the area it seems a good thing. But I would be worried the likes of Birmingham would take more of any funding for services available which would leave Redditch and Bromsgrove being the poorer brother!
It depends on who the other authorities would be. I would not like to be linked with Birmingham as we have different needs in Redditch to that of a big city.