

CGR Phase 1 Consultation Data Analysis

Introduction and methodology

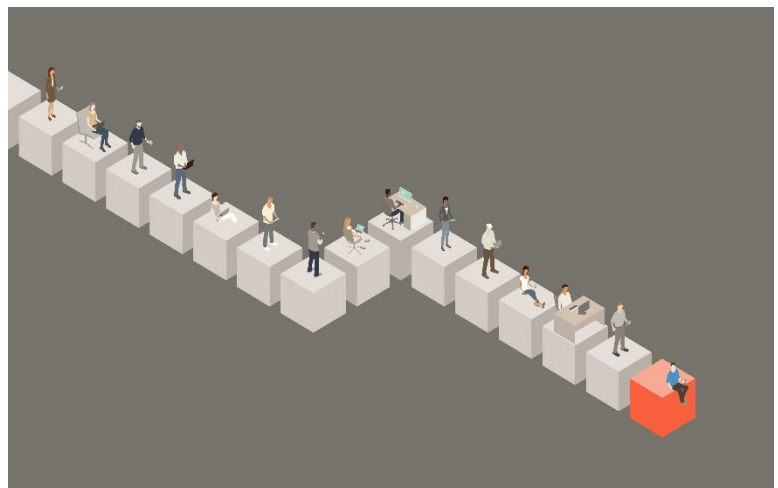
The total number of responses to the consultation was 352. There were 348 responses to the consultation survey, and 4 submissions addressing issues related to the consultation received via email correspondence (see Section 4).

The total number of registered electors in the Epsom and Ewell Borough Council (EEBC) area is 59,193.¹

The survey responses included 2 from individuals who reported postcodes outside of the EEBC area. These replies have not been excluded from the analysis. Also included are 3 responses from individuals that work in the EEBC area, 3 responses from owners of a business or property in the EEBC area, and 2 responses from representatives of a community organisation in the EEBC area.

The key themes from the questionnaire's free text responses were identified using Microsoft Copilot AI. Officers then reviewed the results to confirm that all significant themes were captured. The Copilot analysis has been presented exactly as generated, with no modifications by officers. Any additional officer notes are italicised.

The use of AI to review results from a public consultation mirrors the approach adopted by central government,² and has assisted officers to save time and maintain consistency when reviewing the results of this consultation. Copilot provided a caveat to the counts related to the free text responses, "Note: Counts are approximate, based on a careful scan of the document content."

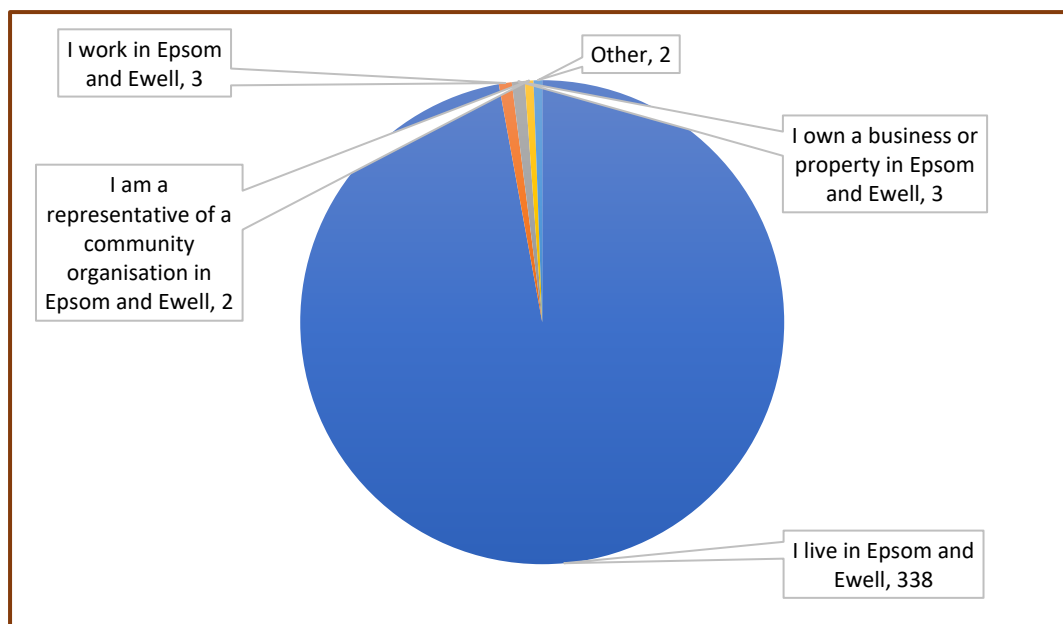


¹ As of 16/10/2025.

² The UK Government has considered the use of AI in consultations and correspondence – see [DfT report from September 2023](#) - and recently built an AI tool to review consultation responses, see [UK Gov 2025](#).

'About you' question: Please state which of the following best describes you

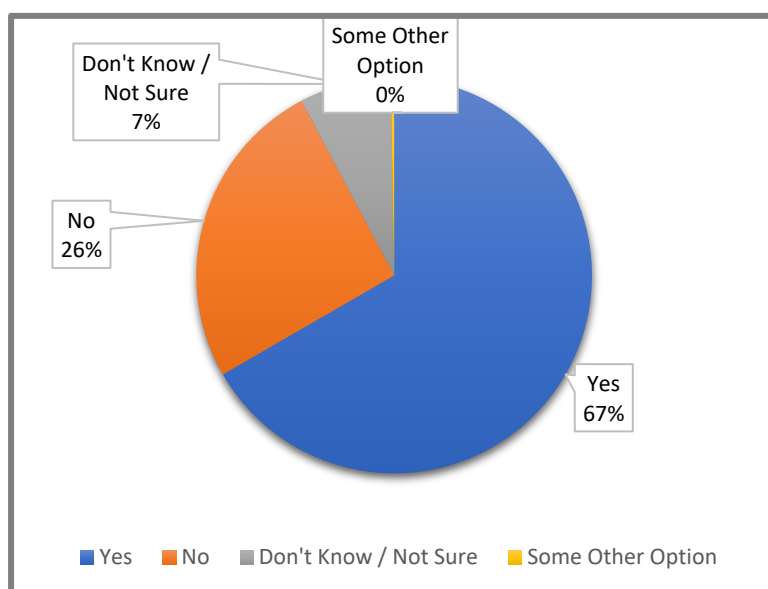
- This question was answered by 348 respondents.
- The majority of the respondents live in the borough. Eight respondents are business owners, workers and representatives of community organisations in the Borough. The remaining two respondents, living outside the Borough, were interested to take part in the consultation.



Question 1-5: Do you agree that one or more parish councils should be created across the whole area of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council area?

Question 1 was answered by 348 respondents.

- The chart above shows that two-thirds (232) of respondents agreed with the statement compared to just over a quarter (89) who did not.
- Note 1: As the free text data from questions 2-5 put forward key themes that are applicable to Question 1 (the parent question), analysis from questions 1-5 have been presented in one section for this report.



- Note 2: If a respondent selected “No” to Question 1 they were prompted to complete the remainder of the survey. For applicable questions, officers have analysed the impact of answering “yes” or “no” to this question on subsequent questions, that is, where the data has shown a clear difference in results depending on how respondents answered this question (Question 1).
- Note 3: The free text analysis for Questions 2-5 was combined and analysed simultaneously, as depending on how a respondent answered, they were then prompted to explain their reasoning using free text. For example:
 - Question 2 asked “Please tell us why you chose Yes...”
 - Question 3 asked “Please tell us why you chose ‘No...’”
 - Question 4 asked “please tell us why you don’t know or are not sure which option you prefer. . .”, and
 - Question 5 asked “Please provide details of other options you suggest”.

Copilot analysis of free text comments

- *The following summarises the themes noted by respondents when asked (in questions 2-5 of the survey) why they chose a particular option in Question 1 (above). 'References' shows the number of times the particular 'theme' is referred to.*

1. Local Representation & Voice

References: ~120

- Many responses strongly support parish councils as a way to maintain or enhance local representation, especially after the abolition of the borough council. Residents fear being “lost” in a larger unitary authority and want a direct voice in local decisions.

2. Community Engagement & Identity

References: ~40

- Parish councils are seen as a means to preserve community spirit, local identity, and traditions. Respondents value opportunities for involvement, local events, and tailored solutions to local challenges.

3. Accountability & Responsiveness

References: ~35

- There is a desire for councillors who are accessible, responsive, and accountable to residents. Parish councils are viewed as more transparent and better able to address issues quickly.

4. Protection of Local Services & Assets

References: ~30

- Respondents worry that local services (parks, community centres, planning, youth services) will suffer under a unitary authority. Parish councils are seen as a way to safeguard these services and assets.

5. Concerns About Bureaucracy & Costs

References: ~60

- A significant number of responses oppose parish councils, citing increased bureaucracy, duplication, and higher council tax. Some argue that the purpose of reorganisation is to simplify governance, not add layers.

6. Effectiveness & Powers of Parish Councils

References: ~25

- Several responses question whether parish councils would have meaningful powers or influence, especially over important matters like planning and enforcement. Some see them as “talking shops” with limited impact.

7. Risk of Fragmentation & Inefficiency

References: ~20

- Concerns are raised about the risk of dividing the borough into competing areas, leading to fragmented priorities, inefficiency, and confusion over responsibilities.

8. Need for Clarity & Consultation

References: ~15

- Some respondents express uncertainty about the proposals, requesting clearer information on costs, powers, boundaries, and the impact on residents.

9. Preference for Existing Structure

References: ~30

- Many responses express satisfaction with the current borough council and oppose changes, arguing that the existing system works well for local needs.

10. Alternative Suggestions

References: ~10

- A minority suggest alternatives such as neighbourhood committees, citizen panels, or strengthening existing forums instead of creating parish councils.

Summary Table

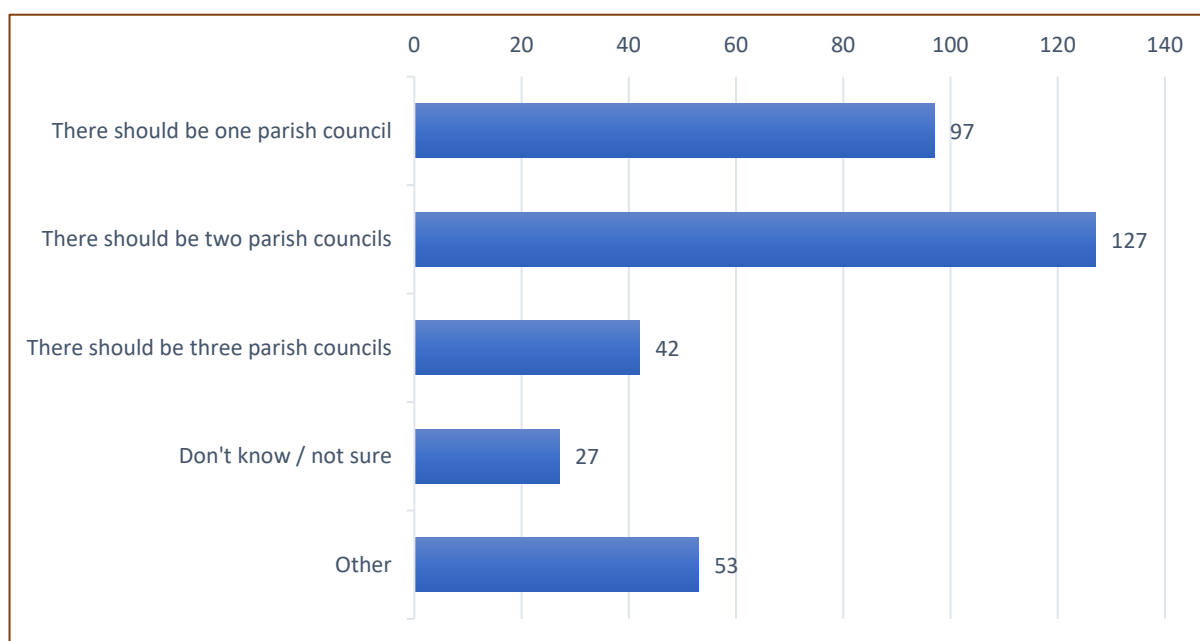
Theme	Approx. Count	Example Sentiments
Local Representation & Voice	120	"Residents need a voice"; "Local accountability"
Community Engagement & Identity	40	"Preserve local character"; "Community spirit"
Accountability & Responsiveness	35	"Councillors are accessible"; "Transparent decisions"
Protection of Local Services & Assets	30	"Safeguard parks, centres"; "Protect local services"
Concerns About Bureaucracy & Costs	60	"More bureaucracy"; "Higher council tax"
Effectiveness & Powers of Parish Councils	25	"Limited powers"; "Talking shops"
Risk of Fragmentation & Inefficiency	20	"Fragmented priorities"; "Confusion over roles"
Need for Clarity & Consultation	15	"Unclear proposals"; "Need more information"
Preference for Existing Structure	30	"Current system works"; "Oppose changes"
Alternative Suggestions	10	"Neighbourhood committees"; "Citizen panels"

Observations

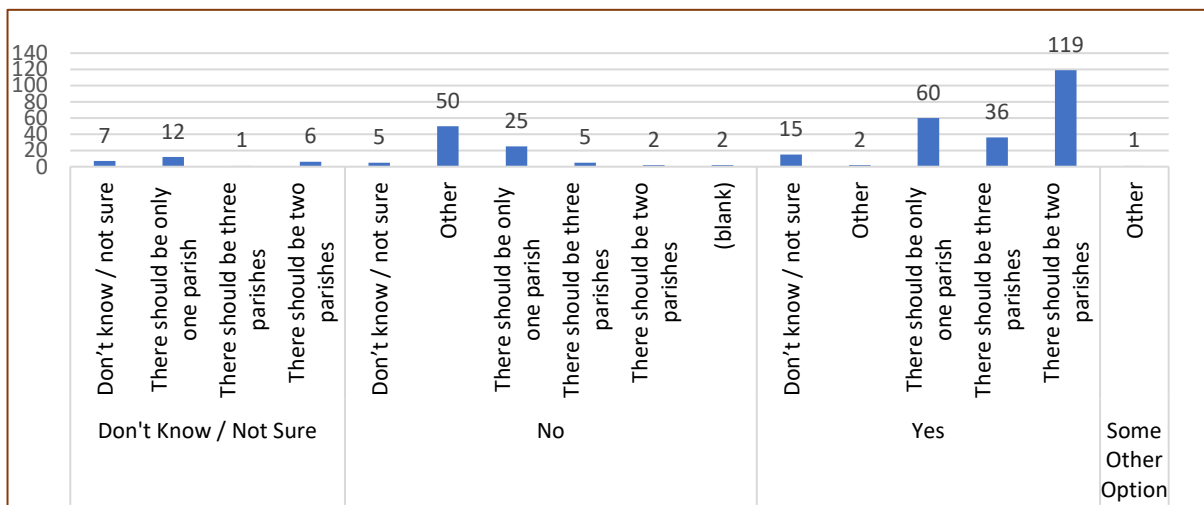
- **Support for parish councils** is primarily driven by the desire for local representation, accountability, and protection of services.
- **Opposition** is rooted in concerns about cost, bureaucracy, and doubts about effectiveness.
- **Uncertainty** and requests for more information are common, indicating a need for clearer communication about the proposals.

Question 6: The preferred option of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council is to create either one or two parishes, each with a parish council, to serve the whole of the borough council area, as shown in the map attached. Do you agree that this is the correct number, or would you prefer a different number of parishes and parish councils?

- This question was answered by 346 respondents.
- Of the 346 responses to this question the most popular was 127 (37%) for 'two parishes'. There were 30 fewer i.e. 97 (28%) responses for the second most common response which was for 'one parish'.



- **Impact based on a person's response to Question 1:**
- The graph below indicates that respondents who answered "No" to Question 1 did not wish to choose one of the provided parish council splits, and rather answer using the "Other" option. Amongst the "yes" responders, the majority chose two parishes.
- Respondents answering 'other' were asked to "Please let us know how many parishes and parish councils should be established for the whole of the Epsom and Ewell Borough Council area and give details of the areas they should cover".



Copilot analysis of free text comments

- Note: the following themes relate to respondents who selected "Other" in response to Question 6.

1. Opposition to Parish Councils

- The overwhelming majority of responses explicitly state that no parish councils should be established. Phrases like "none," "zero," "not needed," "no requirement," and "I do not support" appear repeatedly.
- Many respondents criticize the idea as unnecessary, duplicative, or a waste of time and money.

2. Concerns About Consultation Bias

- Numerous responses highlight that the consultation question is "biased," "leading," or "pre-determines" the outcome.
- Several respondents express frustration that "no parish councils" was not offered as an explicit option, calling the process flawed or unreliable.

3. Cost and Bureaucracy Concerns

- Many responses mention that creating parish councils would add "cost," "bureaucracy," "administrative burden," or "wasteful duplication."

- Some cite existing high council tax and argue that another governance layer would dilute accountability and increase expenses.

4. Minimal Support for Parish Councils

- Only a very small number of responses express any support for parish councils, and those that do generally qualify their support (e.g., only if based on clear evidence or community identity).

5. Desire for Status Quo or Streamlining

- Several responses advocate for maintaining the current structure (Borough Council) or streamlining existing governance rather than adding new layers.

Quantitative Summary

- **Opposition to parish councils:** ~50+ responses (the vast majority)
 - **Concerns about consultation bias:** ~15-20 responses
 - **Cost/bureaucracy concerns:** ~15-20 responses
- **Support for parish councils:** 1-2 responses (with caveats)
 - **Desire for status quo/streamlining:** ~10 responses

Note: Some responses reference multiple themes, so counts may overlap.

Question 7: assuming that all new parishes are of roughly the same size, how many councillors should serve on each (5 is the minimum), depending on how many are created?

- This was a question with four parts – i.e. the four parish options - and one answer was permitted for each part / option separately. Not all respondents provided an answer to all parts of this question. The responses to each option are as follows:

By way of comparison, we currently have 35 councillors across 14 wards at Epsom and Ewell Borough Council.

	5-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	31-35
One parish council	105	46	44	25	43	79
Two parish councils	112	77	94	22	15	19
Three parish councils	147	101	31	19	21	17
Four (or more) parish councils	207	45	27	12	21	24

- One parish council: 342 responses.
- Two parish councils: 339 responses.
- Three parish councils: 336 responses.
- Four (or more) parish councils: 336 responses.
- The choice of 5-10 councillors to serve on each parish was the most popular for each of the options of the number of parishes offered. The second most popular choice varied across each of the options.
- Respondents were asked to add comments if their preferred option was not represented in the above table.
- **Impact based on a person's response to Question 1**
- For participants who selected "No" to Question 1, there was a clear majority in favour of the minimum number of councillors to serve on one, two, three, or four parish councils.

- For participants who answered “Yes” to Question 1 there was a reasonably even spread for one council, the slim majority (55 compared to 41) was in favour of 31-35 councillors with 5-10 coming second; for two parish councils the majority (76-67) was in favour of 16-20, with 11-15 second; for three parish councils it was very close with 81 in favour of 11-15 and 78 in favour of 5-10; and for four parish councils, the overwhelming majority was for 5-10 councillors.
- This data suggests that participants who answered “No” were ‘in favour’ of the minimum number of councillors, which might be a result of the survey design as it requested these respondents to submit an answer for this question regardless of their answer to Question 1 and there was no ‘0’ councillors option. This may be relevant to the free text responses below, as the prompt for these was “if you preferred option is not represented in the table...” leave a comment. Regarding “Yes” respondents, it is not such a clear picture, it could be argued that they generally favoured having less councillors if there were more parish councils. However, for one parish council the results are close across all fields, 31-35 (the most number of councillors) being the slim majority with 5-10 (the least number of councillors) a close second.

Copilot analysis of free text comments

1. Opposition to Parish Councils

- Many responses explicitly state opposition to the creation of parish councils, often insisting that there should be an option for "none" or "zero" councillors.
- Phrases like "No parish council," "None," "Zero," "I do not support the creation of parish councils," and similar appear **over 40 times**.
- Several respondents criticize the survey for not allowing a "no council" or "no councillor" option.

2. Criticism of Survey Design and Bias

- Numerous comments highlight that the survey is perceived as biased or misleading, forcing respondents to select options they do not agree with.
- Examples include: "This survey is biased," "The question is flawed," "I was forced to answer," and "The questionnaire does not allow me to say 0."
- This theme is referenced **at least 20 times**.

3. Preference for One Councillor per Ward or a Specific Number

- Some responses suggest a model of "one councillor per ward" (e.g., 14 councillors if there are 14 wards), or propose specific numbers such as 5, 6, 7–11, or 10 councillors per parish.
- This theme appears **about 10 times**.

4. Support for Maintaining Current Structure or Numbers

- A few responses advocate for keeping the current number of councillors (e.g., 35 in total) or maintaining the status quo, citing historical effectiveness and cost efficiency.
- This is mentioned **around 5 times**.

5. Conditional or Reluctant Answers

- Several respondents state that their answers are only provided because the survey requires it, and do not reflect their true preference.
- This is referenced **at least 10 times**.

6. Suggestions for Fewer or Minimal Councils/Councillors

- Some suggest that if parish councils are created, there should be as few as possible, or only one council for simplicity and efficiency.
- This is mentioned **about 5 times**.

7. Concerns About Representation and Responsibilities

- A few responses discuss the need for representation per ward, or that the number of councillors should reflect the scope of responsibilities.
- This is referenced **about 3 times**.

Summary Table

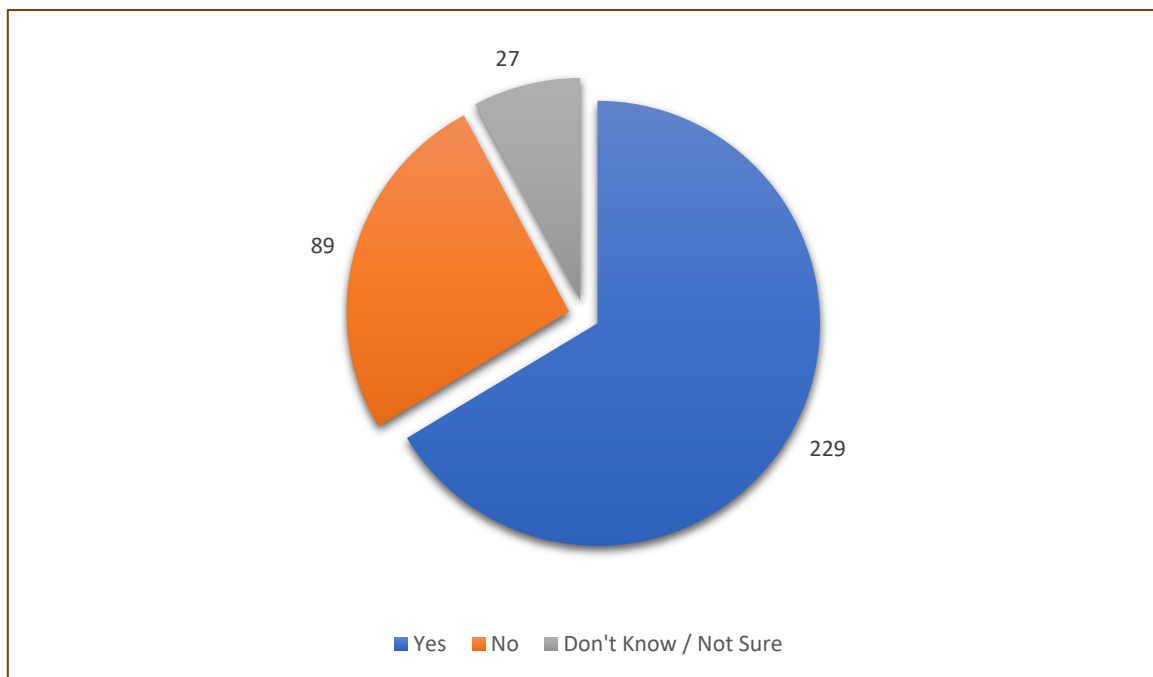
Theme	Approximate Count
Opposition to parish councils / "None"/"Zero"	40+
Criticism of survey design/bias	20+
Preference for one per ward or specific number	10
Support for current structure/numbers	5
Conditional/reluctant answers	10
Fewer/minimal councils/councillors	5
Representation/responsibility concerns	3

Notable Insights:

- The overwhelming majority of responses are opposed to the creation of parish councils and are frustrated by the survey design.
- There is a strong demand for an explicit "no council" or "zero councillor" option.
- Where numbers are suggested, "one per ward" or the minimum required is the most common.

Question 8: The preferred option of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council is that the new parish(es) should be divided into wards, largely along the lines that the existing wards of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council use. Do you think that the new parish(es) should be divided into wards?

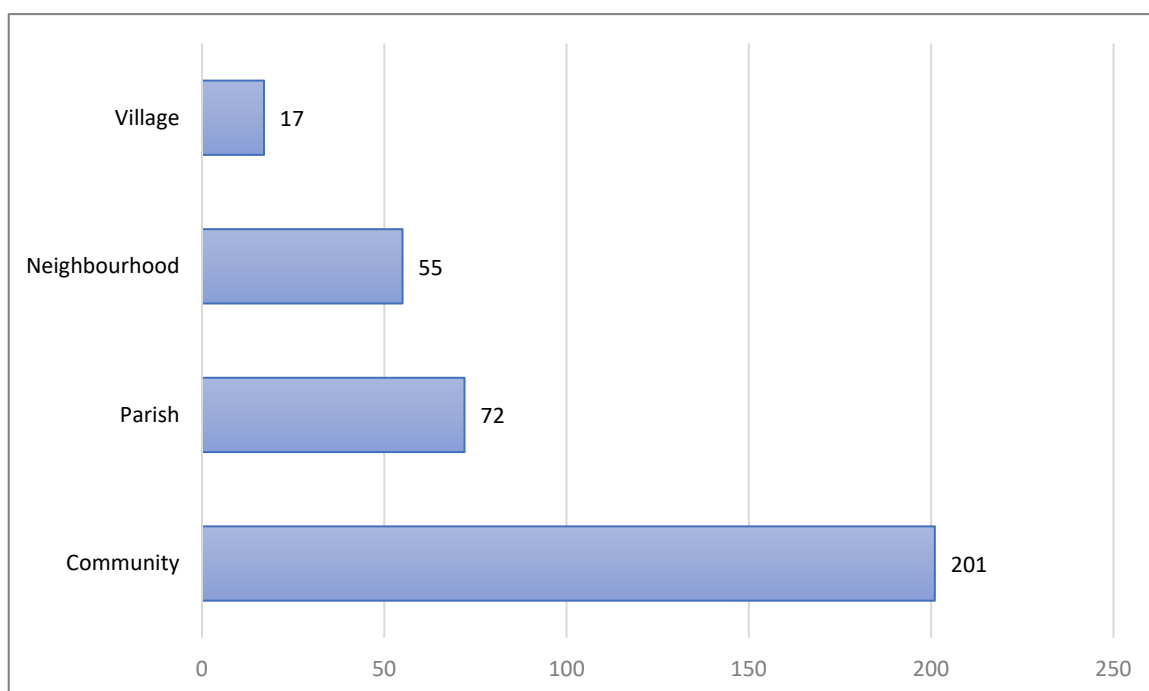
- This question was answered by 345 respondents.
- 229 (66%) of the respondents agreed that the new parish(es) should be divided into wards, whereas 89 respondents (26%) disagreed. The remaining 8% responded 'Don't Know / Not Sure'.



- Most respondents (84%) who answered 'Yes' to Question 1 agreed that parishes should be Warded. Whereas the majority of respondents (72%) who selected 'No' for Question 1 also chose 'No' for this question.

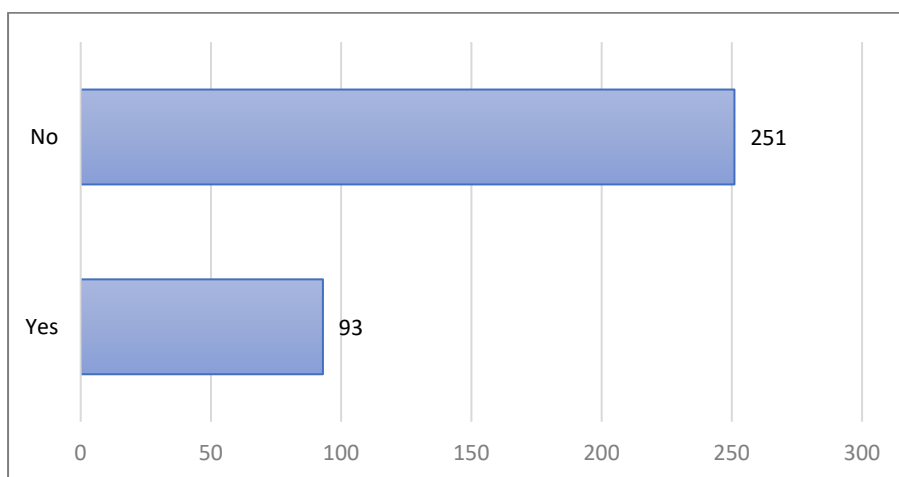
Question 9: Epsom and Ewell Borough Council consider that any new parish should be styled a “community”, and any new parish council should therefore be called a “community council” as this best reflects the nature of the areas that they will serve. However, the styles of “parish”, “neighbourhood” or “village” could also be used. Please let us know your preference below

- This question was answered by 345 respondents.
- The majority of the respondents (201 / 58%) preferred any new parish to be styled as ‘community council’, whereas 72 respondents (21%) preferred ‘parish council’. This was followed by 16% on ‘Neighbourhood council’. ‘Village council’ was the least preferred choice with only 5%.



Question 10: Are you aware of any existing local community governance in the areas (e.g. community or neighbourhood forums, resident associations etc.) which would serve the local community as a better alternative to a parish council?

- This question was answered by 344 respondents.
- Those respondents who answered yes to the above question were then asked to “Please tell us more about the group, the area it covers and the reason for your answer”. The key themes of these 93 responses are highlighted below.



Copilot analysis of free text comments

1. Residents Associations

- **Most frequently referenced theme.**
- Mentioned in various forms: “Residents Association,” “RA,” “local residents association,” “Ewell Village Residents’ Association (EVRA),” “Woodcote Residents Association,” “Stoneleigh Residents Association,” “Clarendon Park Residents Association,” “Epsom & Ewell Residents Association,” “Ewell Court Residents Association,” “Cuddington Residents’ Association,” “College Ward Residents Association,” etc.

- **Count:** Over 60 direct references (including variations and specific names).

2. Neighbourhood/Community Forums & Groups

- Includes mentions of “Neighbourhood Forum,” “Stoneleigh Neighbourhood Forum,” “community group,” “community hub,” “community boards.”
 - **Count:** At least 10 references.

3. Councillors Representing Residents

- Several responses highlight the role of local councillors, often linked to residents associations, as effective representatives.
 - **Count:** At least 8 references.

4. Epsom Civic Society and Other Civic Groups

- “Epsom Civic Society,” “Downs Road Estate Association,” “Epsom Common Association,” “Friends of Rosebery Park,” “Epsom Downs Conservation,” “U3A,” “Neighbourhood Watch.”
 - **Count:** At least 8 references.

5. Preference for Existing Structures Over Parish Council

- Many responses express satisfaction with current arrangements (residents associations, borough council, unitary authority) and skepticism or opposition to creating a parish council.
- **Count:** At least 15 explicit statements of preference for existing structures or opposition to a parish council.

6. Concerns About Consultation Process

- Some responses criticize the consultation as biased or leading toward a parish council outcome.
 - **Count:** 2–3 direct references.

7. Unitary Authority as Preferred Model

- Several responses advocate for services to be run by a unitary authority rather than adding a parish council layer.
- **Count:** 5–6 references.

8. Other Local Groups

- Mentions of “Wiltshire Council Local Area Boards,” “Residential Group,” “SARA,” “SANF,” “EWCA,” “WERS,” etc.
- **Count:** 10+ references (including overlaps with residents associations).

Summary Table

Theme	Approx. Count
Residents Associations (all forms)	60+
Neighbourhood/Community Forums & Groups	10
Councillors Representing Residents	8
Civic Society & Other Civic Groups	8
Preference for Existing Structures	15
Concerns About Consultation Process	3
Unitary Authority as Preferred Model	6
Other Local Groups (named/overlapping)	10+

Key Insights

- **Residents associations** are overwhelmingly seen as the main alternative to a parish council, with deep roots and broad representation across Epsom and Ewell.
 - There is **support for existing governance structures** and skepticism about the need for a parish council.
- **Community forums and civic groups** play a supplementary role but are less frequently cited than residents associations.
- **Concerns about the consultation process** and the preference for a **unitary authority** are notable but less dominant themes.

Question 11: Are there any further comments you would like to add about the Community Governance Review or the proposal to create one or more parishes and parish councils in Epsom and Ewell?

- This question was answered by 190 respondents.

Copilot analysis of free text comments

1. Opposition to Parish/Community Councils

- Many responses express strong opposition to the creation of parish or community councils, citing concerns about unnecessary bureaucracy, increased costs, and lack of genuine choice in the consultation.
 - **Count:** ~30 responses

2. Preference for Maintaining Current Structure

- Several comments advocate for retaining the existing borough/district council structure, arguing "if it isn't broken, don't fix it" and expressing satisfaction with current local governance.
 - **Count:** ~20 responses

3. Concerns About Consultation Process

- Numerous responses criticize the consultation as biased, misleading, or "rigged," noting that it presupposes agreement with parish councils and does not allow for a "no" option.
 - **Count:** ~25 responses

4. Cost and Funding Concerns

- Many respondents are worried about the financial implications, including council tax increases, lack of transparency about costs, and the perceived waste of public funds.

- **Count:** ~18 responses

5. Local Representation and Accountability

- Some responses highlight the importance of local representation, advocating for councils that reflect community identity and provide a voice for residents.

- **Count:** ~15 responses

6. Preference for Specific Options

- Several comments reference specific options (e.g., Option 1, Option 2) for council boundaries, with some favoring a single council and others supporting two councils divided between Epsom and Ewell.

- **Count:** ~12 responses

7. Naming and Identity

- There are multiple remarks about the naming of councils, with some preferring "community council" over "parish council" due to secular and inclusive connotations.

- **Count:** ~8 responses

8. Concerns About Effectiveness and Powers

- Some respondents question whether new councils would have meaningful powers or simply add another layer of government with limited impact.

- **Count:** ~10 responses

9. Desire for Improved Communication and Engagement

- A few responses call for better communication, more detailed information, and genuine engagement with residents.

- **Count:** ~6 responses

10. Support for Local Councils

- A minority of responses support the idea of local councils, citing benefits such as improved local services, community engagement, and representation.

- **Count:** ~7 responses

Summary Table

Theme	Approx. Count
Opposition to Parish/Community Councils	30
Preference for Maintaining Current Structure	20
Concerns About Consultation Process	25
Cost and Funding Concerns	18
Local Representation and Accountability	15
Preference for Specific Options	12
Naming and Identity	8
Concerns About Effectiveness and Powers	10
Desire for Improved Communication	6
Support for Local Councils	7

Additional analysis

- *Officers ran an additional Copilot AI analysis on the topic of the potential parish boundaries included in Appendix 1 of the Phase 1 Consultation:*

Option Preferences (1, 2, 3, 4)

- **Option 2** is frequently cited as preferable, especially because it reflects the historic and community distinction between Epsom and Ewell. Several respondents feel this split is logical and aligns with local identity and existing wards. Some specifically mention that Option 2 is “workable and acceptable” and “the obvious sensible split,” with Epsom Town and Ewell Village as natural centres of community.
- **Option 3** is described as “strange,” with criticism that it cuts the town in two in the middle, which is seen as illogical. However, a few respondents say it is preferred if two areas are chosen, but most lean towards Option 2.
- **Option 1** is mentioned as preferable by some, especially if two community councils are formed, but it is less commonly supported than Option 2.
- **Option 4** is referenced in terms of having one councillor per area/ward, with some support for this structure if a single council is chosen.

2. East-West vs. North-South Divide

- There is a recurring suggestion to consider a **north-south divide** rather than east-west. One comment explicitly asks whether a north/south split has been considered, suggesting that the southern areas (Stamford, Woodcote, Langley Vale) are more rural and have more in common, while the northern wards differ in character.
- Some respondents note that Option 3 is “not east/west, it’s more north/south,” but critique that the division does not reflect community realities.
- Others prefer the east-west split as it aligns with the historic Epsom/Ewell divide, which is reflected in Option 2.

3. Context Referring to Wards

- Many comments stress the importance of grouping wards with similar characteristics, especially rural versus urban distinctions. For example, grouping Stamford, Woodcote, and Langley Vale together is seen as logical due to their rural nature.
- There is concern that splitting the borough in ways that do not respect ward identities will cause confusion and reduce the effectiveness of representation.
- Some respondents advocate for a single council represented by the existing 14 wards, arguing that this would avoid unnecessary fragmentation and maintain a unified voice for the borough.

Additional Themes

- **Simplicity and Clarity:** Many respondents want the structure to be as simple as possible, with clear boundaries and minimal bureaucracy.
- **Local Identity:** There is strong support for arrangements that preserve local identity and community ties, especially those reflected in current ward boundaries.
- **Concerns about Bureaucracy and Cost:** Several comments express concern that creating multiple councils or splitting the borough will increase costs and administrative complexity without clear benefits.

Key Quotes

- “Option 2 is the obvious sensible split into 2 councils as it has Epsom Town and Ewell Village as the natural 2 centres of community.”
- “If there were more than one council, Option 2, yellow, is the best one. Option 3, grey, is very strange, cutting town in two in the middle.”
- “If we have more than one parish council then the areas/wards need to be similar, ie Stamford/Woodcote/Langley Vale grouped together as they are much more rural than the wards in the north of the borough and have more in common.”
- “I wonder whether a North / South divide of the Borough has been considered, so that the town and areas to the South would be on one area and Ewell and Stoneleigh and to the North would be in another area.”

Summary Table of Preferences

Option	Support	Rationale
Option 1	Some	Preferred if two councils, but less common than Option 2
Option 2	Strong	Aligns with Epsom/Ewell divide, reflects community identity and wards
Option 3	Mixed/Negative	Criticized for illogical split, “strange” division
Option 4	Some	Supported for single council with one councillor per ward