



Community Governance Consultation

August 2025

Christchurch Town

Research and Consultation Team

Qualitative Analysis and Report by Darmax Research

Executive Summary

BCP Council are consulting on draft proposals to create new parish, town and community councils across Bournemouth and Poole and to make some small changes to the existing town/parish arrangements in Christchurch.

Before any decisions are made, the council sought the views of local residents on the existing parish and town council arrangements in Christchurch Town.

This report summarises the free-text responses to the consultation.

Methodology

Qualitative analysis and reporting was undertaken by Darmax Research Ltd.

Results

Reasons for agreement/disagreement

Respondents were asked to provide their reasons for why they agree or disagree with the draft recommendations for Christchurch Town.

129 respondents provided feedback to this question. 59 of these respondents live in Christchurch Town, while 70 live outside of Christchurch Town.

Feedback from Christchurch residents was mixed, with both support and opposition expressed. Respondents who supported the proposals commented on the value of retaining Christchurch Town Council, its role in representing local people, and the sense that current arrangements were working well. Those who opposed the proposals felt that parish and town councils were generally unnecessary and costly.

While some Christchurch residents welcomed the amendments to the boundary, others felt that areas such as Friars Cliff would be better served by being part of the Highcliffe and Walkford Parish.

Administrative concerns were also common. Many opposed the additional tier of governance, describing it as unnecessary duplication and an inefficient use of resources, particularly given the creation of BCP Council. Others suggested reverting to the former system of three separate councils. Some respondents supported the allocation of councillors as broadly appropriate, while others felt that the ratio of councillors to population was inconsistent. Dual roles for councillors serving on both BCP and Christchurch Town Councils were also questioned.

Concerns about cost were frequently raised, with respondents noting that town councils add financial burdens on residents through higher precepts. Some pointed out that Christchurch's precept was already considerably higher than other parish areas, without clear justification.

Respondents also commented on the consultation process, expressing frustration over a lack of detail about the role of town councils, insufficient supporting evidence, and concerns about political motivations behind the proposals.

Those who live outside Christchurch were generally more critical than residents. While some supported Christchurch's distinct identity and independence, more felt parish councils were unnecessary, inconsistent across the conurbation, and added avoidable bureaucracy. Many highlighted equity concerns, inconsistency in boundary sizes, and questioned whether smaller parishes should exist alongside much larger town councils.

Any other comments about the draft recommendations

Respondents were asked to provide any other comments about the draft recommendations for Christchurch Town.

53 respondents provided additional comments, 25 from Christchurch and 28 from outside the area.

Christchurch residents who supported the proposals were generally satisfied with current arrangements and wished to see Christchurch Town Council retained. Those opposed suggested abolishing it entirely and that parish and town councils were generally unnecessary. Boundary concerns again focused on Friars Cliff; with suggestions it should be incorporated into Highcliffe and Walkford.

Administrative concerns included the need for clearer separation of responsibilities between parish/town councils and BCP Council. Some called for disbanding BCP Council altogether and returning to the previous system of three independent councils.

Cost concerns were also reiterated, with residents highlighting that Christchurch Town Council remains more expensive than neighbouring parish councils.

Comments on the consultation itself reflected scepticism over whether resident views would be considered and calls for any changes to be determined by public referendum at the next local elections.

Respondents outside Christchurch also questioned the value of parish councils, raising similar concerns about administration, duplication of services, and costs. They criticised inconsistencies across the proposals and the inequity of precepts. Some felt that the changes risked fragmentation and reduced accountability for BCP Council. Others again called for a referendum before any decisions are finalised.

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1 Methodology

Qualitative analysis and reporting was undertaken by Darmax Research Ltd.

Qualitative responses (write in text) to questions were exported into Excel and were thematically analysed. The most common themes are reported on in this report. Anonymised quotes from participants have been used to illustrate the themes identified.

Please note that while the purpose of qualitative data is to provide deeper insights into reasoning and impact rather than to quantify data, the numbers of respondents who mentioned the most prevalent themes are provided in this report to give an indication of the magnitude of response. However, given the nature of qualitative data, it should be noted that this does not provide an indication of significance in relation to the question asked.

In addition, where respondents have provided comments that relate to more than one theme, their feedback has been categorised into multiple categories. Where a response makes several different points, only the relevant part to the discussed theme is shown in the report.

2 Analysis and results

2.1 Reasons for agreement/disagreement

Respondents were asked to provide their reasons for why they agree or disagree with the draft recommendations for Christchurch Town.

129 respondents provided feedback to this question. 59 of these respondents live in Christchurch Town, while 70 of these respondents live outside of Christchurch Town.

Responses have been coded into key themes to make them easier to interpret. Please note that where respondents have provided comments that relate to more than one theme, their feedback has been categorised into multiple categories.

Theme	Number of respondents		
	Respondent living in proposal area	Respondent living outside proposal area	Total
General support	19	10	29
General opposition	10	25	35
Boundaries and parish/town allocation	25	10	35
Administration/management of decisions	21	42	63
Cost of delivery	8	10	18
Consultation/decision process	8	5	13
Other	0	2	2

2.1.1 Respondents living in proposal area

19 respondents expressed support for the proposals. Respondents felt that it is a **good idea to retain Christchurch Town Council**, which works well and represents the voice of local residents.



“It is important to have local representation on local issues.”

“Things seem to work well at the moment so no need to change.”

10 respondents opposed retaining Christchurch Town Council and that **parish councils in general are an unnecessary expense** and waste of resources.



“The town council and councillors are an expense that is not needed.”

“Parish Councils are archaic in this day and age. In the end they appear to cost more money than is necessary.”

25 respondents commented on boundaries. Respondents commented that the proposed **amendments to boundaries made sense** and that the **name of the council** should remain the same. However, a number of respondents suggested that it would be more appropriate for **Friars Cliff** to be part of the Highcliffe and Walkford parish.



“The proposed changes to boundaries, particularly around the harbour entrance and Hurn River, are technically sound and provide coterminous with electoral boundaries. The pragmatic correction of these minor anomalies is welcomed.”

“The council's name should be unchanged.”

“Friars Cliff gets no effective representation in Christchurch Town Council. With only two councillors, and a very different make up to the other town centre areas, our interests would be better served by joining Highcliffe.”

21 respondents raised administrative issues. A number of respondents commented that the **council serves no purpose**, is an unnecessary additional layer of local governance and does not do anything meaningful that is not already undertaken by BCP Council. However, respondents also commented that Christchurch was **better served prior to the amalgamation** of the town council into BCP Council and that they support it reverting back to the previous separate three councils. While some respondents commented that the allocation and **number of councillors** was appropriate, others felt that the ratio of councillors to population was not consistent. Respondents also questioned whether it was appropriate for **councillors to be on both BCP Council as well as Christchurch Town Council**.



“This council serves no useful purpose, is expensive, and undertakes works that are already largely done by BCP.”

“An unnecessary additional layer of local government and costs.”

“I support the measures over less independence for Christchurch, but the survey did not include an option to get rid of BCP Council and just leave Christchurch. You will recall that 83% of Christchurch residents voted against the merger.”

“The ratio of councillors to population is out of kilter.”

“Councillors should not sit on both BCP and Christchurch councils but should be required to work together along with other parish councils.”

8 respondents expressed concerns about **cost**. Respondents felt that town councils are costly and the expense should not be placed on local residents.



“It is only costing us money and is yet another layer of authority.”

8 respondents commented on the **consultation** itself. Respondents commented on a lack of detail relating to the role of town councils and it had been imposed on residents as a result of political motivation.



"I have no idea about how effective the local councillors are at influencing decisions in the town for positive impact."

"The parish councils in Christchurch were only ever established as a political sop for superannuated councillors who were losing their seats in the new BCP arrangement."

2.1.2 Respondents living outside proposal area

10 respondents supported the proposals, the town has a strong identity and should continue to have its own council with **no reason to change**.



"Christchurch has shown itself to be independent and self-governing."

"Christchurch has been a long established as an independent town."

25 respondents opposed retaining Christchurch Town Council and that **parish councils in general are an unnecessary expense** and waste of resources.



"Have not read anything to suggest benefit of parish councils of any kind in current financial environment."

"I disagree with the need for parish and town councils."

10 respondents commented on boundaries. Respondents commented that there were **inconsistencies across the proposals** and that it would be better if the size of wards and councillor numbers were evenly distributed. Respondents suggested that **other parishes should be combined** and incorporated into the town councils.



"The problem with the draft recommendations are their incredible inconsistency. Why should any comparably sized area be treated differently? Such a situation is inherently unfair and undemocratic."

"The boundary should be expanded to include the existing Hurn parish and the 600 residents within. Hurn should be abolished and the money saved out to better use."

42 respondents raised administrative issues. Respondents felt that the additional tier of councils were an **unnecessary level of administration and bureaucracy** that should have been solved by the formation of BCP Council. Respondents commented that service delivery should be the responsibility of BCP Council and that the additional level of governance would result in **inequity across the conurbation**,

while residents would be unsure of the functions performed by the different councils. Respondents also felt that there are **sufficient number of councillors** to support local communities. Respondents were also concerned by the personality types that parish and town councils might attract as well as concern if seats were uncontested.



“We have enough council governance as a tri borough council (BCP) and do not need another level of governance.”

“There is already a BCP council, there should be no need for parish or town councils if BCP council are doing their job properly.”

“Issues concerning the need for consistency, coordination and planning across the entire conurbation.”

“How are people supposed to know who does what? How can you ensure that the various parish councils act with any consistency?”

“Too many councillors and the main council is sufficient.”

“Uncontested elections are deeply undemocratic.”

10 respondents expressed concerns about cost. Respondents questioned the justification for the precept in Christchurch being **more expensive than other areas** and that the additional tier of governance is an unnecessary cost to tax payers.



“What is the justification for Christchurch Town’s precept? 3.5 times higher than Burton and Winkton.”

“Parish councils are an unnecessary administrative tier. They result in additional costs - without value for money - for council tax payers.”

5 respondents criticised the **consultation process**. Respondents commented that there was insufficient evidence to support the draft recommendations and that the proposals lacked sufficient detail to offer an informed opinion.



“There is insufficient information to be able to make an informed decision on any of these draft recommendations.”

2.2 Any other comments about the draft recommendations

Respondents were asked to provide any other comments about the draft recommendations for Christchurch Town.

53 respondents provided feedback to this question. 25 of these respondents live in Christchurch Town, while 28 of these respondents live outside of Christchurch Town.

Responses have been coded into key themes to make them easier to interpret. Please note that where respondents have provided comments that relate to more than one theme, their feedback has been categorised into multiple categories.

Theme	Number of respondents		
	Respondent living in proposal area	Respondent living outside proposal area	Total
General support	7	4	11
General opposition	4	12	16
Boundaries and parish/town allocation	3	4	7
Administration/management of decisions	9	12	21
Cost of delivery	4	5	9
Consultation/decision process	3	3	6
Other	1	1	2

2.2.1 Respondents living in proposal area

7 respondents expressed support for the proposals, are **happy with the way things are** and that functions and responsibility should sit with the town council as it currently is.



“No changes I am fully supportive of the Christchurch Council.”

4 respondents opposed the recommendations, arguing that the council and other **parish councils should be abolished**.



“Christchurch Town Council should be abolished. There is no need for it.”

3 respondents commented on boundaries and that **Friars Cliff** should be part of the Highcliffe and Walkford parish.



“If you are going to add areas to the west of Christchurch, then please lose the Friars Cliff area to balance this to the east.”

9 respondents raised administrative issues. Respondents felt that the additional tier of councils were an **unnecessary level of administration and bureaucracy**. Respondents commented that BCP Council should be **disbanded** and revert back to the previous three town council governance structure. Respondents also commented that BCP Council should be the **only level of governance** and should focus on delivering services. Respondents commented that a town clerk should provide support to councillors who receive appropriate training.



“Remove BCP Council and establish a single tier independent council of Christchurch.”

“Council tax should be reduced and services improved.”

“It would be advisable for Christchurch Town Council to ensure it appoints a suitably qualified and experienced Clerk to support councillors and restore public confidence in its operations. For these recommendations to have lasting value, BCP Council should consider strengthening training requirements for all councillors post-election.”

4 respondents expressed concerns about cost. Respondents commented that Christchurch Town Council costs are **more expensive than other areas** and that the precept should not be as high as proposed.



“Christchurch town council is a lot more expensive than others. Where does the money go and am I getting value?”

“Lower precept - more appropriate to us.”

3 respondents commented on the consultation overall and the decision-making process. Respondents were concerned as to whether the **views of residents would actually be considered** and there is a **lack of information** with regards to the town council.



“I doubt very much that BCP Council will take any notice of the views of residents.”

“I would like to have more information about the parish of Christchurch Town - who our six councillors were and when may meet etc and how accessible they are?!”

1 respondent commented that there should be more **cycle lanes** and mixed use pavements.



“More cycle lanes or mixed use pavements.”

2.2.2 Respondents living outside proposal area

4 respondents who live outside the proposed area supported the proposals, providing local residents with a **stronger voice** than representation in BCP Council.



“Where practicable the Town Council provides a stronger voice for the parish residents than the representation on the BCP Council.”

12 respondents opposed the draft recommendations. These respondents felt **parish councils were unnecessary** and represent poor value for money.



“A drain on public funding and no substance offered for improved services.”

4 respondents commented on boundaries. Respondents felt that the various proposals **lacked consistency**, with a lack of justification for smaller parishes in some areas while others were much larger and part of a town council. Respondents did comment that the boundary amendments to Christchurch Town Council made sense and would make future elections easier to administer.



“A further level of inconsistency exists in the recommendations by the inclusion of Town Parishes. In many cases smaller parishes are recommended within the historic towns of BCP. The recommended Town Parishes seem to be a mopping up of areas which are not recommended for smaller parishes, with absolutely no logical basis. While most particularly evident in Bournemouth, this applies to Christchurch as well.”

“Amending the parish ward boundaries in polling districts CM7 and CM8 is supported as it would make administering local and parish elections more straightforward - ensuring parish wards contain electors from the same BCP Council ward.”

12 respondents expressed concerns about administration. Respondents commented on added level of **administration and bureaucracy**, while BCP Council should be responsible for service delivery rather than pass responsibilities on to the smaller councils. Respondents commented that **existing councillors** should take on more responsibility than creating more roles, which candidates may not be suitably qualified for. The proposals would also result in **inequity of service delivery** across the conurbation.



“The whole premise seems to be a way to offload some responsibilities from the council but the approach of getting some members of the community, whose only qualification may be the location of their house, to take these responsibilities on seems very risky.”

“The creation of parish councils will be damaging for BCP Council, enabling greater fragmentation and corruption, preventing the change the area needs.”

5 respondents highlighted **cost concerns**. These included fears of rising council tax and insufficient detail about financial implications.



“Why is the precept for Christchurch Town Council so much more than the other parish councils?”

“This is clearly going to end up costing residents money that simply cannot be afforded in a cost of living crisis.”

3 respondents criticised the **consultation process**. Respondents questioned the motives behind the proposals and no decision should be made without a referendum.



“No decisions should be made before 2027 and then only following a referendum.”

“People are trying to circumvent the elected authority to suit their own politics.”

1 respondent made other comments, requesting an **active police presence** to address various anti-social behaviours.



“An active police presence to deter aggressive begging, drug dealing and anti-social behaviour.”