

SHAPING SURREY'S FUTURE

Devolution and
Local Government
Reorganisation

Final Plan

May 2025



APPENDIX 6: GOVERNMENT CORRESPONDENCES



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Jim McMahon OBE MP

*Minister of State for Local Government and
English Devolution*

2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

To: Leaders of all two-tier councils and
neighbouring unitary authorities

16 December 2024

Dear Leaders

The English Devolution White Paper published today sets out how the Government plans to deliver on our manifesto pledge to transfer power out of Westminster through devolution and to fix the foundations of local government. You will receive under separate cover a letter outlining the ambition and key elements of the White Paper, but I also wanted to write to areas which might be in scope for a joint programme of devolution and local government reorganisation, to set out a clear process and key milestones.

The Government's long-term vision is for simpler structures which make it much clearer for residents who they should look to on local issues, with fewer politicians able to focus on delivering. Local government reorganisation, alongside devolution over a large strategic geography, can drive economic growth whilst delivering optimal public services. To help deliver these aims, we will facilitate local government reorganisation in England for two-tier areas and for unitary councils where there is evidence of failure, or where their size or boundaries may be hindering an ability to deliver sustainable, high-quality public services.

Given how much interest there has been, and will continue to be in this programme, I am writing now to all councils in two-tier areas, and to neighbouring smaller unitary authorities, to give you further detail and to set out our plans to work with you over the coming months.

Local government reorganisation

My intention is to formally invite unitary proposals in January 2025 from all councils in two-tier areas, and small neighbouring unitary councils. In this invitation, I will set out further detail on the criteria I will consider when taking decisions on the proposals that are submitted to Government. I intend to ask for interim plans by March 2025.

As set out in the White Paper, new unitary councils must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks. For most areas, this will mean creating councils with a population of 500,000 or more. However, there may be exceptions to ensure new structures make sense for an area, including on devolution. Final decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis. We will ask you to work with other councils in your area to develop unitary proposals that are in the best interests of the whole area, rather than developing competing proposals.

Devolution

We are clear that reorganisation should not delay devolution. Plans should be complementary, with devolution remaining the overarching priority. In January, we will therefore also set out which areas will be included in our Devolution Priority Programme, aimed at places ready to come together under the sensible geography criteria set out in the White Paper and wishing to progress to an accelerated timescale. This will be with a view to inaugural mayoral elections in May 2026. This is an exciting programme and there has already been significant interest even before the White Paper was published.

I am aware that different places will be in different stages of their devolution journey. While some will already have an existing strategic authority, others may be in the process of establishing one, and others still may need reorganisation to take place before they can fully benefit from devolution.

I also understand that delivering these ambitious plans for devolution and for local government reorganisation will be a significant change. It will be essential for councils to work with local partners, including MPs, to develop plans for sustainable unitary structures capable of delivering the high-quality public services that residents need and deserve.

Transition and implementation

We are under no illusion about the scale of issues facing local government. It is in all our interests to make sure we are avoiding unnecessary spend at a time when budgets are already tight, so we will be working with sector partners to avoid use of expensive consultants wherever possible.

My department will be working closely with the Local Government Association, District Councils Network, County Councils Network and others, to develop a shared understanding of how reorganisation can deliver the best outcomes for local residents and businesses. We have a collective responsibility to ensure councils are better supported throughout reorganisation. This will include preparing robust proposals with evidence, standing up new unitary councils ready for vesting day and work to deliver the significant opportunities that are possible by creating suitably sized unitary structures. We will take a phased approach and expect to deliver new unitary authorities in April 2027 and 2028.

Timelines and next steps

I have heard from some areas that the timing of elections affects their planning for devolution, particularly alongside reorganisation. To help manage these demands, alongside our objectives on devolution, and subject to meeting the timetable outlined in this letter, I am minded-to lay secondary legislation to postpone local council elections from May 2025 to May 2026.

However, I will only do this where this will help the area to deliver both reorganisation and devolution to the most ambitious timeframe – either through the Devolution Priority Programme or where reorganisation is necessary to unlock devolution or open up new devolution options. There will be two scenarios in which I will be willing to postpone elections;

- Areas who are minded-to join the Devolution Priority Programme, where they will be invited to submit reorganisation proposals to Government by Autumn 2025.
- Areas who need reorganisation to unlock devolution, where they will be invited to submit reorganisation proposals to Government by May 2025.

For any area in which elections are postponed, we will work with areas to move to elections to new 'shadow' unitary councils as soon as possible as is the usual arrangement in the process of local government reorganisation.

For all other areas elections will take place as scheduled in May 2025, and I will invite in January proposals for reorganisation to be submitted to Government by Autumn 2025.

To lay the relevant legislation to postpone elections, I will need a clear commitment to devolution and reorganisation aims from upper-tier councils in an area, including a request from the council/s whose election is to be postponed, on or before Friday 10 January. This request must set out how postponing the election would enable the council to make progress with reorganisation and devolution in parallel on the Devolution Priority Programme, or would speed up reorganisation and enable the area to benefit from devolution as quickly as possible once new unitary structures are in place.

I am working together with my colleague and fellow Minister, Baroness Taylor, who will host a webinar with leaders and chief executives of councils to discuss the next steps I have outlined in this letter. I hope you will be able to attend that discussion.

I welcome your views on any matters raised in this letter. As set out above, I will require a clear commitment to delivering both reorganisation and devolution to the most ambitious timeframe, with any request to delay council elections by Friday 10 January. Please respond or direct any queries to EnglishDevolutionLGENquiries@communities.gov.uk.

I look forward to working with you to build empowered, simplified, resilient and sustainable structures for local government. I am copying this letter to council Chief Executives, and where relevant to Best Value Commissioners. I am also copying this letter to local Members of Parliament, and where relevant to Mayors of combined (county) authorities, and Police (Fire) and Crime Commissioners.

Yours ever,



JIM MCMAHON OBE MP

Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution



Cllr Tim Oliver OBE
Leader of Surrey County Council

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Surrey
RH2 8EF
02085418003

tim.oliver@surreycc.gov.uk

Jim McMahon OBE MP
Minister for Local Government and English Devolution
[by email]

Wednesday 8 January 2025

Dear Minister,

RE: Devolution and Local Government Reform for Surrey

I welcome the clarification contained in the English Devolution White Paper of the Government's commitment to transfer power closer to communities, helping all places in England to realise their full potential. I share the Paper's ambitions for boosting the country's economic prospects and reforms to strengthen the efficiency and effectiveness of our public services.

In March 2024, Surrey County Council agreed a Level 2 Devolution Framework Agreement and implementation is well underway. It is clear to me that reforming the structure of local government is an enabler to unlocking the full benefits of further devolution for the county. This was recognised at meetings of our Council and Cabinet on 8 January. The Leaders of all councils in Surrey also met on 7 January to discuss how we can collectively harness the opportunities presented through the White Paper.

The current two-tier structure of local government in Surrey, comprising 12 sovereign local authorities, is fragmented and in a number of areas inefficient which inevitably diverts resources away from delivering the services that residents rightly expect. I believe reorganisation would provide more streamlined and cost-effective services for Surrey, enabling us to achieve further efficiencies and deliver better outcomes for our residents and communities.

Local government reorganisation is a crucial stepping stone to further devolution for Surrey, to enable our communities to take more control of their own destinies. This county already has a very strong track record for growth, delivering over £50 billion of Gross Value Added every year, but further and deeper devolution could lead to even better returns to support this Government's Plan for Change to kickstart economic growth.

I am therefore writing to ask you to exercise your Ministerial powers to lay the necessary legislation to postpone the County Council elections in Surrey, which are due to take place in May 2025. This will give us the time to work with the Leaders of Surrey's District and Borough Councils to put together proposals for local government reform that are necessary to unlock further devolution for Surrey.

Our current two-tier structure will require reorganisation to enable the development of a Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) for Surrey. New unitary elections could then take place in 2026 and a Mayoral election in 2027. However, mindful of the White Paper's reference to MSAs usually covering

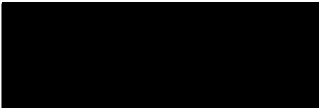
places with populations larger than 1.5 million it would also make sense to engage concurrently with neighbouring authorities to explore the benefits of forming, or joining, an MSA over a larger footprint.

A postponement of the county elections will also allow time to give consideration in any business case to how we can best manage the unique, significant financial risk of the level of debt currently held across the Surrey local government footprint. Any proposals for local government reorganisation will need to adequately consider how to ensure the sustainable operation of any new authority/ies and we will request the government to write off those debts.

In addition to working with District and Borough Councils, I will also work with MPs, Town and Parish Councils, businesses, the Police and Health Authorities, the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector, and our residents, to build on our ambition of a more integrated set of public services across the county.

I look forward to starting the conversation with you on the future of Surrey. I am copying this letter to all Surrey MPs, as well as District and Borough Leaders.

Yours sincerely,



Cllr Tim Oliver OBE
Leader of Surrey County Council



**Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government**

Jim McMahon OBE MP

*Minister of State for Local Government and
English Devolution*
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Our reference: MC2025/03733

To: Leaders of two-tier councils in Surrey:

Elmbridge Borough Council
Epsom and Ewell Borough Council
Guildford Borough Council
Mole Valley District Council
Reigate and Banstead Borough Council
Runnymede Borough Council
Spelthorne Borough Council
Surrey County Council
Surrey Heath Borough Council
Tandridge District Council
Waverley Borough Council
Woking Borough Council

5 February 2025

Dear Leaders,

This Government has been clear on our vision for simpler, more sustainable, local government structures, alongside a transfer of power out of Westminster through devolution. We know that councils of all political stripes are in crisis after a decade of decline and instability. Indeed, a record number of councils asked the government for support this year to help them set their budgets.

This new government will not waste this opportunity to build empowered, simplified, resilient and sustainable local government for your area that will increase value for money for council taxpayers. Local leaders are central to our mission to deliver change for hard-working people in every corner of the country through our Plan for Change, and our councils are doing everything they can to stay afloat and provide for their communities day in, day out. The Government will work closely with you to deliver these aims to the most ambitious timeline.

I am writing to you now to formally invite you to work with other council leaders in your area to develop a proposal for local government reorganisation, and to set out further detail on the criteria, guidance for the development of proposals, and the timeline for this process. A formal invitation with guidance for the development of your proposals is attached at Annex A. This invitation sets out the criteria against which proposals will be assessed.

Developing proposals for reorganisation

We expect there to be different views on the best structures for an area, and indeed there may be merits to a variety of approaches. Nevertheless, it is not in council taxpayers' interest to devote public funds and your valuable time and effort into the development of multiple proposals which unnecessarily fragment services, compete against one another, require

lengthy implementation periods or which do not sufficiently address local interests and identities.

The public will rightly expect us to deliver on our shared responsibility to design and implement the best local government structures for efficient and high-quality public service delivery. We therefore expect local leaders to work collaboratively and proactively, including by sharing information, to develop robust and sustainable unitary proposals that are in the best interests of the whole area to which this invitation is issued, rather than developing competing proposals.

This will mean making every effort to work together to develop and jointly submit one proposal for unitary local government across the whole of your area. The proposal that is developed for the whole of your area may be for one or more new unitary councils and should be complementary to devolution plans. It is open to you to explore options with neighbouring councils in addition to those included in this invitation, particularly where this helps those councils to address concerns about their sustainability or limitations arising from their size or boundaries or where you are working together across a wider geography within a strategic authority.

I understand there will be some cases when it is not possible for all councils in an area to jointly develop and submit a proposal, despite their best efforts. This will not be a barrier to progress, and the Government will consider any suitable proposals submitted by the relevant local authorities.

Supporting places through change

It is essential that councils continue to deliver their business-as-usual services and duties, which remain unchanged until reorganisation is complete. This includes progress towards the Government's ambition of universal coverage of up-to-date local plans as quickly as possible. To support with capacity, I intend to provide some funds for preparing to take forward any proposal, and I will share further information later in the process.

Considering the efficiencies that are possible through reorganisation, we expect that areas will be able to meet transition costs over time from existing budgets, including from the flexible use of capital receipts that can support authorities in taking forward transformation and invest-to-save projects.

The default position is that assets and liabilities remain locally managed by councils, but we acknowledge that there are exceptional circumstances where there has been failure linked to capital practices. Where that is the case, proposals should reflect the extent to which the implications of this can be managed locally, including as part of efficiencies possible through reorganisation, and Commissioners should be engaged in these discussions. We will continue to discuss the approach that is proposed with the area.

I welcome the partnership approach that is being taken across the sector to respond to the ambitious plans set out in the White Paper. My department will continue to work closely with the Local Government Association (LGA), the District Councils Network, the County Councils Network and other local government partners to plan how best to support councils through this process. We envisage that practical support will be needed to understand and address the key thematic issues that will arise through reorganisation, including managing service impacts and opportunities for the workforce, digital and IT systems, and leadership support.

Timelines and next steps for interim plans and full proposals

We ask for an interim plan to be submitted on or before 21 March 2025, in line with the guidance set out in the attached Annex. My officials will provide feedback on your plan to help support you to develop final proposals.

Given the urgency of creating sustainable unitary local government for Surrey, I have decided to make legislation to postpone the local elections in your area from May 2025 to May 2026 to provide additional capacity for speeding up reorganisation. This will also enable Surrey to benefit from devolution as quickly as possible once new unitary local government is in place. My department will now work with your area to facilitate reorganisation to the most ambitious timeframe possible.

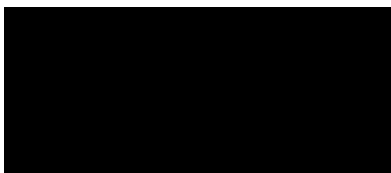
I will expect any full proposal to be submitted **by 9 May**. If I decide to implement any proposal, and the necessary legislation is agreed by Parliament, we will work with you to move to elections to new ‘shadow’ unitary councils as soon as possible as is the usual arrangement in the process of local government reorganisation.

Following submission, I will consider any and all proposals carefully before taking decisions on how to proceed. My officials are available throughout to discuss how your reorganisation and devolution aspirations might work together and what support you think you might need to proceed.

This is a once in a generation opportunity to work together to put local government in your area on a more sustainable footing, creating simpler structures for your area that will deliver the services that local people and businesses need and deserve. As set out in the White Paper, my commitment is that clear leadership locally will be met with an active partner nationally.

I am copying this letter to council Chief Executives, and to Best Value Commissioners. I am also copying this letter to local Members of Parliament, and the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Yours sincerely,



JIM MCMAHON OBE MP

Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN HEALTH ACT 2007**INVITATION FOR PROPOSALS FOR A SINGLE TIER OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, in exercise of his powers under Part 1 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 ('the 2007 Act'), hereby invites any principal authority in the area of the county of **Surrey**, to submit a proposal for a single tier of local government.

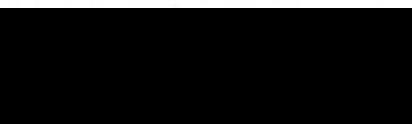
This may be one of the following types of proposal as set out in the 2007 Act:

- Type A – a single tier of local authority covering the whole of the county concerned
- Type B – a single tier of local authority covering an area that is currently a district, or two or more districts
- Type C – a single tier of local authority covering the whole of the county concerned, or one or more districts in the county; and one or more relevant adjoining areas
- Combined proposal – a proposal that consists of two or more Type B proposals, two or more Type C proposals, or one or more Type B proposals and one or more Type C proposals.

Proposals must be submitted in accordance with paragraphs 1 to 3:

1. Any proposal must be made by **9 May 2025**.
2. In responding to this invitation an authority must have regard to the guidance from the Secretary of State set out in the Schedule to this invitation, and to any further guidance on responding to this invitation received from the Secretary of State.
3. An authority responding to this invitation may either make its own proposal or make a proposal jointly with any of the other authorities invited to respond.

Signed on behalf of the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government.



F KIRWAN

A senior civil servant in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

5 February 2025

SCHEDULE

Guidance from the Secretary of State for proposals for unitary local government.

Criteria for unitary local government

- 1. A proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government.**
 - a) Proposals should be for sensible economic areas, with an appropriate tax base which does not create an undue advantage or disadvantage for one part of the area.
 - b) Proposals should be for a sensible geography which will help to increase housing supply and meet local needs.
 - c) Proposals should be supported by robust evidence and analysis and include an explanation of the outcomes it is expected to achieve, including evidence of estimated costs/benefits and local engagement.
 - d) Proposals should describe clearly the single tier local government structures it is putting forward for the whole of the area, and explain how, if implemented, these are expected to achieve the outcomes described.

- 2. Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.**
 - a) As a guiding principle, new councils should aim for a population of 500,000 or more.
 - b) There may be certain scenarios in which this 500,000 figure does not make sense for an area, including on devolution, and this rationale should be set out in a proposal.
 - c) Efficiencies should be identified to help improve councils' finances and make sure that council taxpayers are getting the best possible value for their money.
 - d) Proposals should set out how an area will seek to manage transition costs, including planning for future service transformation opportunities from existing budgets, including from the flexible use of capital receipts that can support authorities in taking forward transformation and invest-to-save projects.
 - e) For areas covering councils that are in Best Value intervention and/or in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support, proposals must additionally demonstrate how reorganisation may contribute to putting local government in the area as a whole on a firmer footing and what area-specific arrangements may be necessary to make new structures viable.
 - f) In general, as with previous restructures, there is no proposal for council debt to be addressed centrally or written off as part of reorganisation. For areas where there are exceptional circumstances where there has been failure linked to capital practices, proposals should reflect the extent to which the implications of this can be managed locally, including as part of efficiencies possible through reorganisation.

3. Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens.

- a) Proposals should show how new structures will improve local government and service delivery, and should avoid unnecessary fragmentation of services.
- b) Opportunities to deliver public service reform should be identified, including where they will lead to better value for money.
- c) Consideration should be given to the impacts for crucial services such as social care, children's services, SEND and homelessness, and for wider public services including for public safety.

4. Proposals should show how councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views.

- a) It is for councils to decide how best to engage locally in a meaningful and constructive way and this engagement activity should be evidenced in your proposal.
- b) Proposals should consider issues of local identity and cultural and historic importance.
- c) Proposals should include evidence of local engagement, an explanation of the views that have been put forward and how concerns will be addressed.

5. New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements.

- a) Proposals will need to consider and set out for areas where there is already a Combined Authority (CA) or a Combined County Authority (CCA) established or a decision has been taken by Government to work with the area to establish one, how that institution and its governance arrangements will need to change to continue to function effectively; and set out clearly (where applicable) whether this proposal is supported by the CA/CCA /Mayor.
- b) Where no CA or CCA is already established or agreed then the proposal should set out how it will help unlock devolution.
- c) Proposals should ensure there are sensible population size ratios between local authorities and any strategic authority, with timelines that work for both priorities.

6. New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment.

- a) Proposals will need to explain plans to make sure that communities are engaged.
- b) Where there are already arrangements in place it should be explained how these will enable strong community engagement.

Developing proposals for unitary local government

The following matters should be taken into account in formulating a proposal:

Boundary Changes

- a) Existing district areas should be considered the building blocks for your proposals, but where there is a strong justification more complex boundary changes will be considered.
- b) There will need to be a strong public services and financial sustainability related justification for any proposals that involve boundary changes, or that affect wider public services, such as fire and rescue authorities, due to the likely additional costs and complexities of implementation.

Engagement and consultation on reorganisation

- a) We expect local leaders to work collaboratively and proactively, including by sharing information, to develop robust and sustainable unitary proposals that are in the best interests of the whole area to which this invitation is issued, rather than developing competing proposals.
- b) For those areas where Commissioners have been appointed by the Secretary of State as part of the Best Value Intervention, their input will be important in the development of robust unitary proposals.
- c) We also expect local leaders to engage their Members of Parliament, and to ensure there is wide engagement with local partners and stakeholders, residents, workforce and their representatives, and businesses on a proposal.
- d) The engagement that is undertaken should both inform the development of robust proposals and should also build a shared understanding of the improvements you expect to deliver through reorganisation.
- e) The views of other public sector providers will be crucial to understanding the best way to structure local government in your area. This will include the relevant Mayor (if you already have one), Integrated Care Board, Police (Fire) and Crime Commissioner, Fire and Rescue Authority, local Higher Education and Further Education providers, National Park Authorities, and the voluntary and third sector.
- f) Once a proposal has been submitted it will be for the Government to decide on taking a proposal forward and to consult as required by statute. This will be a completely separate process to any consultation undertaken on mayoral devolution in an area, which will be undertaken in some areas early this year, in parallel with this invitation.

Interim plans

An interim plan should be provided to Government on or before **21 March 2025**. This should set out your progress on developing proposals in line with the criteria and guidance. The level of detail that is possible at this stage may vary from place to place but the expectation is that one interim plan is jointly submitted by all councils in the area. It may be the case that the interim plan describes more than one potential proposal for your area, if there is more than one option under consideration. The interim plan should:

- a) identify any barriers or challenges where further clarity or support would be helpful.
- b) identify the likely options for the size and boundaries of new councils that will offer the best structures for delivery of high-quality and sustainable public services across the area, along with indicative efficiency saving opportunities.
- c) include indicative costs and arrangements in relation to any options including planning for future service transformation opportunities.
- d) include early views as to the councillor numbers that will ensure both effective democratic representation for all parts of the area, and also effective governance and decision-making arrangements which will balance the unique needs of your cities, towns, rural and coastal areas, in line with the Local Government Boundary Commission for England guidance.
- e) include early views on how new structures will support devolution ambitions.
- f) include a summary of local engagement that has been undertaken and any views expressed, along with your further plans for wide local engagement to help shape your developing proposals.
- g) set out indicative costs of preparing proposals and standing up an implementation team as well as any arrangements proposed to coordinate potential capacity funding across the area.
- h) set out any voluntary arrangements that have been agreed to keep all councils involved in discussions as this work moves forward and to help balance the decisions needed now to maintain service delivery and ensure value for money for council taxpayers, with those key decisions that will affect the future success of any new councils in the area.



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Jim McMahon OBE MP

*Minister of State for Local Government and
English Devolution*

2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

:

Our reference: MC2025/02958

Councillor Tim Oliver OBE,
Leader of Surrey County Council

5 February 2025

Dear Cllr Oliver

On 16 December 2024 I wrote to you advising that I was considering laying secondary legislation to postpone local council elections from May 2025 to May 2026, only in those areas where I am certain that postponing the election is necessary to help the area to deliver both reorganisation and devolution to the most ambitious timeframe – either through the Devolution Priority Programme or where reorganisation is necessary to unlock devolution or open up new devolution options.

Thank you for your subsequent letter to me setting out your request to postpone the Surrey County Council election from May 2025 to May 2026. I am very conscious of the work you would have undertaken locally to support such a letter and am grateful for your commitment and rapid engagement. I have carefully considered your request and given the urgency of creating sustainable unitary local government for the county area of Surrey, I have decided to agree to postpone the county election from May 2025 to May 2026. This will provide councils in this area additional capacity for speeding up reorganisation, and it will also enable Surrey to benefit from devolution as quickly as possible once new unitary local government is in place.

There was rightly a very high bar for postponing any local election and I am clear postponing the election to 2026 will support Surrey to deliver both reorganisation and devolution to the most ambitious timeframe.

I am laying the legislation necessary to postpone the May 2025 election for one year and to extend councillors' terms of office accordingly. The legislation will also postpone the changes to the County's electoral divisions made in recent boundary changes legislation, so they come into effect alongside the May 2026 election. This will ensure that any vacancies arising before May 2026 will be filled at by-elections on the current boundaries.

Today I provided an update on how the Government is taking forward its commitment to deliver the most ambitious programme of devolution this country has seen, and manifesto pledge to fix the foundations of local government. You will receive your statutory invitation for local government reorganisation separately, alongside all councils in your area, which will set out next steps for developing new unitary proposals.

I remain grateful for the leadership and commitment you have demonstrated on progressing with devolution and reorganisation and look forward to working with you to deliver these changes.

I am copying this letter to your Chief Executive. I am also copying this letter to the Surrey District and Borough Leaders, the Commissioners at Woking Borough Council, Surrey Members of Parliament and Police and Crime Commissioners.

Yours sincerely,

A solid black rectangular box redacting the signature of Jim McMahon.

JIM MCMAHON OBE MP



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Jim McMahon OBE MP

*Minister of State for Local Government and
English Devolution*

**Ministry of Housing, Communities
and Local Government**

2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF

www.gov.uk/mhclg

Leaders of Surrey Councils
By email

24 March 2025

Dear Leaders,

Thank you for sharing your progress on the development of your proposals for local government reorganisation by 21 March. I am grateful for your hard work and commitment to get to this stage. I look forward to reading your interim plan for simplifying local government structures, to more sustainably and efficiently deliver for your communities.

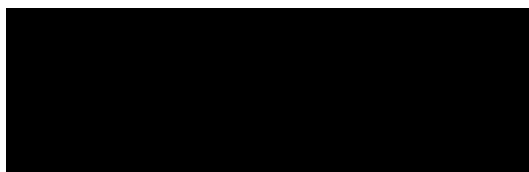
Taken together this represents the largest single package of reform of local government in England for over a half a century, and it provides a once in a generation opportunity to rebuild the foundations of local government so that it is fit to face the challenges ahead with confidence.

To support the continued development of proposals, my department will provide feedback on your interim plan. You can expect to receive this next week. My officials will also schedule meetings with your officers to discuss the feedback and any further support we can offer during that week. My department will continue to be available throughout the process to discuss your plans for local government reform and devolution. I encourage you to draw upon them as you continue to develop your proposals.

My department, in collaboration with the Local Government Association, is hosting a webinar to discuss the next steps for the LGR programme following the submission of interim plans. The webinar will also outline the support plans moving forward. The webinar is scheduled for Thursday 3 April, from 2:30pm to 3:30pm and is intended for officers. An invitation will be sent to your Chief Executives shortly.

I look forward to receiving your final submission in May. I will then thoroughly consider the final proposals before deciding on how to proceed. I am copying this letter to your Chief Executives together with the Woking Borough Council Commissioners, Surrey MPs and the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Yours sincerely,



JIM MCMAHON OBE MP

Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

4 April 2025

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION
INTERIM PLAN FEEDBACK: SURREY

To the Chief Executives of:
Elmbridge Borough Council
Epsom and Ewell Borough Council,
Guildford Borough Council
Mole Valley District Council
Reigate and Banstead Borough Council
Runnymede Borough Council
Spelthorne Borough Council
Surrey County Council
Surrey Heath Borough Council
Tandridge District Council
Waverley Borough Council
Woking Borough Council

Overview:

Thank you for submitting your interim plans. The amount of collaboration and hard work from all councils is clear to see across the range of options being considered. For the final proposals, each council can submit a single proposal for which there must be a clear single option and geography for the area as a whole.

Our aim for the feedback on interim plans is to support areas to develop final proposals. This stage is not a decision-making point, and our feedback does not seek to approve or reject any option being considered.

The feedback provided relates to the following interim plans submitted by Surrey councils:

- The County and District co-authored LGR interim plan part A, and both parts of the LGR interim plan part B, authored by the County Council and the District and Borough Councils.
- The letter submitted by Reigate and Banstead and Crawley councils, regarding the Surrey/West Sussex boundary.

We have provided feedback on behalf of central government. It takes the form of:

1. A summary of the main feedback points,
2. Our response to the specific barriers and challenges raised in your plans,
3. An annex with more detailed feedback against each of the interim plan asks.

We reference the guidance criteria included in the invitation letter throughout, a copy can be found at [Letter: Surrey - GOV.UK](#). Our central message is to build on your initial work and ensure that the final proposal addresses the criteria and is supported by data and evidence. We recommend that final proposal(s) should use the same assumptions and data sets or be clear where and why there is a difference.

Summary of feedback:

1. The criteria ask for proposals *covering councils that are in Best Value intervention and/or in receipt of exceptional financial support to additionally demonstrate how reorganisation may contribute to putting local government in the area as a whole on a firmer footing and what area-specific arrangements may be necessary to make new structures viable.*

Also, for areas where there are exceptional circumstances where there has been failure linked to capital practices, proposals should reflect the extent to which the implications of this can be managed locally, including as part of efficiencies possible through reorganisation (see criterion 2).

We note that the County and District co-authored plan shows that greater efficiencies are available where there is less disaggregation, with the single unitary enabling the greatest efficiency that could benefit the management of local debt. Given the scale of the financial challenges facing Surrey, we would welcome further detail on how the ability to manage debt compares in each of the different options. As the long-term financial sustainability of the three unitary option seems most challenging in this context, we will need more information on how you will manage the risks of disaggregation to meet the financial sustainability criteria as well as the approach to debt management.

We suggest meeting to discuss in more detail local proposals for managing debt.

2. The criteria asks that consideration should be given to the impacts for crucial services such as social care, children's services, SEND and homelessness, and for wider public services including for public safety (see criterion 3). **For all options, further detail will be helpful on how the different options might impact on**

these services, where there is disaggregation and how risks can be mitigated.

3. The criteria sets out that if a 500,000 population figure does not make sense for an area, the rationale should be provided (see criterion 2). **More detail on those rationales would be helpful, and you may wish to support existing narratives with data.**
4. We welcome the steps you have taken to come together to prepare proposals as per criterion 4.
 - a. **Effective collaboration between all councils will be crucial; we would encourage you to continue to build strong relationships and agree ways of working, including around effective data sharing. This will support the development of a robust shared evidence base to underpin final proposals.**
 - b. **In particular, it would be helpful for final proposals to use the same assumptions and data sets, or be clear where and why there is a difference.**
 - c. **It would be helpful if your final proposal set out how the data and evidence supports all the outcomes you have included, and how well they meet the assessment criteria in the invitation letter.**
 - d. **You may wish to consider an options appraisal that will help demonstrate why your proposed approach, overall, best meets the assessment criteria in the invitation letter compared to any alternatives, and a counterfactual of a single unitary.**

Response to specific barriers and challenges raised

1. Joint solution to managing Surrey's debt

We note the desire for clarity and further discussions around the area's debt position and your preferred option for Government to write off the current estimated debt of £1.5bn. As highlighted above and set out in criterion 2, the default position is that assets and liabilities remain locally managed by councils, but we acknowledge that there are exceptional circumstances where there has been failure linked to capital practices. Where that is the case, proposals should reflect the extent to which the implications of this can be managed locally, including as part of efficiencies possible through reorganisation. Commissioners should be engaged in these discussions. It would be helpful to see further detail in proposals on the projected financial sustainability of proposed unitaries and how they could manage debt locally (for example, projections of unitaries' core funding, operational budget, debt servicing costs (MRP and interest), General Fund debt/CFR, and the contribution of transformation/efficiencies). We suggest meeting again to discuss in more detail local proposals for managing debt.

2. Preparations for a Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA)

New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements.

Devolution options and associated timelines will be subject to the option pursued for reorganisation.

As the co-authored plan notes, under a single unitary model, unlocking devolution would mean partnering up with neighbouring authorities or joining a neighbouring mayoral authority. To achieve devolution in this way, the area will need to ensure the proposed devolution geography meets the criteria set out in the English Devolution White Paper.

Under both the two or three unitary proposals, devolution could also be explored on a Surrey-only footprint, subject to achieving sensible population ratios between unitaries as potential constituent members of a future MSA and what that may mean for governance options.

The Reigate and Banstead and Crawley proposal does not outline a proposed devolution geography for the new proposed unitary. Under criterion 5, “New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements”, we would therefore ask for information on how the proposal would unlock devolution for the wider area, particularly in the context of the proposed Sussex and Brighton MSA.

Timing-wise, we would look to explore delivering devolution alongside reorganisation as far as possible and subject to the outcome of the upcoming Spending Review. This means we would look to begin the process shortly after new shadow unitary elections. For the creation of a new MSA, mayoral elections could take place in the same year as the new unitary go-live dates. For joining an existing MSA, we would typically look to align with the MSA’s election cycle.

Subject to the above and timings aligning, the functions for which a future MSA would be responsible would not require disaggregation. This would include many of the functions highlighted, including strategic planning, economic development, regeneration and skills, and employment support.

While we cannot pre-judge devolution decisions, we are happy to discuss further any eventual transition period between establishing the new unitary authorities and a potential MSA taking effect.

3. Swift and smooth transition for LGR

We can discuss the best approach for the transition following the final decision on the proposals. This can include what arrangements may work best for the whole area, such as a lead SRO at a council and/or what joint working arrangements may work best for the area.

4. Timely and constructive feedback on our proposals

This is our feedback to support you to develop final proposal(s), we are open to providing ongoing support to your work to progress your final plan. Richard Enderby has been appointed as your MHCLG point person and is ready to engage with the whole area on issues you wish to discuss further.

5. Capacity funding support

£7.6 million will be made available in the form of local government reorganisation proposal development contributions, to be split across the 21 areas. Further information will be provided on this funding, and we recognise that your area's share may come after your final proposal have been submitted.

In terms of transitional costs, as per the invitation letter, we expect that areas will be able to meet transition costs over time from existing budgets, including from the flexible use of capital receipts that can support authorities in taking forward transformation and invest-to-save projects. We note the estimate of your transition costs and comment further on this in the table below.

6. Engagement with Leaders and officers

We are committed to supporting all invited councils equally while they develop any proposal or proposals.

7. Co-terminosity of public sector services

We welcome the desire to maximise the opportunity for public service reform, and it would be good to know what you are thinking in more detail to understand how we might support.

8. Impacts from government funding reforms

Government recently consulted on finance reforms and confirmed that some transitional protections will be in place to support areas to their new allocations.

Further details on finance reform proposals and transition measures will be consulted on after the spending review in June.

We will not be able to provide further clarification on future allocations in the meantime but are open to discussing assumptions further if we can assist in financial planning.

9. Service delivery risks

We welcome your wish to minimise service delivery risk during transition.

10. Consultation

Expectations on engagement and consultation are in the invitation letter. We note the interim plans set out a range of engagement with stakeholders. As requested, we are happy to engage further on the consultation requirements in statute.

ANNEX: Detailed feedback on criteria for interim plan

Overview	Detailed feedback
<p>Identify the likely options for the size and boundaries of new councils that will offer the best structures for delivery of high-quality and sustainable public services across the area, along with indicative efficiency saving opportunities.</p> <p>Relevant criteria: 1 c) Proposals should be supported by robust evidence and analysis and include an explanation of the outcomes it is expected to achieve, including evidence of estimated costs/benefits and local engagement</p> <p>&</p> <p>2 a-f) - Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks</p> <p>&</p> <p>3 a-c) Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens</p>	<p>We will assess final proposals against the criteria in the invitation letter. Referencing criterion 2, it would be helpful to provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breakdowns that are as detailed as possible for where efficiency savings will be made, with clarity of assumptions on how estimates have been reached and the data sources used, including differences in assumptions between proposals. • Information on the counterfactual against which efficiency savings are estimated, with values provided for current levels of spending. • The inclusion of a single unitary option as a benchmark against which to consider the potential net savings from two and three unitary options would be useful. • A clear statement of what assumptions have been made, and if the impacts of inflation are taken into account. • A summary covering sources of uncertainty or risks with modelling, as well as predicted magnitude and impact of any unquantifiable costs or benefits. • Where possible quantified impacts on service provision, as well as wider impacts. <p>We recognise that the interim plans set out the financial assessment is subject to further work. The bullets below indicate where further information would be helpful across all options. The level of financial appraisal varied, and we would welcome significantly more for the Reigate and Banstead and Crawley plan. As per criterion 2 it could be helpful to see:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • additional data and evidence to set out how your final proposal would enable financially viable councils, including identifying which option best delivers value for money for council tax payers (see criterion 2e). • further detail on potential finances of new unitaries, for example, funding, operational budgets, potential budget surpluses/shortfalls, total borrowing (General Fund), and debt servicing costs (interest and MRP); and what options may be available for rationalisation of potentially saleable assets. • clarity on the underlying assumptions underpinning any modelling e.g. assumptions of future funding, demographic growth and pressures, interest costs, Council Tax, savings earmarked in existing councils' MTFs. • financial sustainability both through the period to the creation of new unitary councils as well as afterwards. • as per criterion 2f proposals should reflect the extent to which the implications of how debt can be managed locally, including as part of efficiencies possible through reorganisation. We would welcome a greater understanding of the proposals for managing debt in each of the options, and demonstration of

	<p>which option will best support the management of local debt. As above this could include appraisal of total borrowing and debt servicing costs within new structures (and assessment of affordability against funding/operational costs), and the potential for rationalisation of saleable assets.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Given the scale of the financial challenges facing Surrey, we would welcome further detail on how the ability to manage debt compares in each of the different options. As the long-term financial sustainability of the three unitary option seems most challenging in this context, it would be helpful to have more information on how you will manage the risks of disaggregation to meet the financial sustainability criteria as well as the approach to debt management. Relevant commissioners should be engaged on these discussions. <p>As set out in criterion 2b proposals for all options not aiming for a population of 500k it would be helpful to demonstrate why their preferred population approach makes sense for the area.</p> <p>We would welcome further details on how services can be maintained where there is disaggregation, such as social care, children’s services, SEND, homelessness, and for wider public services including for public safety. Under criterion 3c) you may wish to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the potential impacts on services in the plan outlined by Reigate and Banstead and Crawley: for example, how will police and fire governance be addressed. • What would the different options mean for local services provision, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ do different options have a different impact on SEND services and distribution of funding and sufficiency planning to ensure children can access appropriate support, and how will services be maintained? ○ What is the impact on adults and children’s care services? Is there a differential impact on the number of care users and infrastructure to support them from the different options? ○ What options have you considered for partnership for joint working across the new unitaries for the delivery of social care services? ○ Do different options have variable impacts as you transition to the new unitaries, and how will risks to safeguarding to be managed? ○ Do different options have variable impacts on schools, support and funding allocation, and sufficiency of places, and how will impacts on school be managed? ○ Highway services, across the area under the different approaches suggested?
<p>Include indicative costs and arrangements in</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We would welcome further clarity on how the assumptions and data for how the transition costs and efficiencies were

<p>relation to any options including planning for future service transformation opportunities.</p> <p>Relevant criteria - 2d) Proposals should set out how an area will seek to manage transition costs, including planning for future service transformation opportunities from existing budgets, including from the flexible use of capital receipts that can support authorities in taking forward transformation and invest-to-save projects.</p>	<p>calculated. (see criterion 2d)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We recommend that all options and proposals should use the same assumptions and data sets or be clear where and why there is a difference. (linked to criterion 1c) • The estimates for savings are indicative; it would be helpful if final proposals could provide further details on the methodology used to aid understanding of the reasons for the differing savings outcomes between two and three unitary models. (see criterion 2d) • In response to criterion 2d further detail would also be helpful on the potential service transformation opportunities and invest-to-save projects from unitarisation across a range of services - e.g. consolidation of waste collection and disposal services or in relation to fire governance, and will different options provide different opportunities for back-office efficiency savings?
<p>Include early views as to the councillor numbers that will ensure both effective democratic representation for all parts of the area, and also effective governance and decision-making arrangements which will balance the unique needs of your cities, towns, rural and coastal areas, in line with the Local Government Boundary Commission for England guidance.</p> <p>Relevant criteria: 6) New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment.</p>	<p>As per criterion 6 in the invitation letter,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • new unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment. • Additional details on how the community will be engaged, specifically how the governance, participation and local voice will be addressed to strengthen local engagement and democratic decision-making would be helpful. • In final proposal(s) we would welcome detail on your plans for neighbourhood-based governance, impact on parish councils, and thoughts about formal neighbourhood partnerships and area committees. • We welcome the early view you have provided of councillor numbers, which we will be sharing with the LGBCE.
<p>Include early views on how new structures will support devolution ambitions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As the co-authored plan notes, under a single unitary model, unlocking devolution would mean partnering up with neighbouring authorities or joining a neighbouring mayoral authority. If considering this route, under criterion 5, the area

<p>Relevant Criteria: 5) New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements.</p> <p>Specifically 5b) Where no CA or CCA is already established or agreed then the proposal should set out how it will help unlock devolution.</p>	<p>should ensure the proposed geography meets the criteria set out in the English Devolution White Paper</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Under both the two or three unitary proposals, devolution could also be explored on a Surrey only footprint, subject to achieving sensible population ratios between unitaries as potential constituent members of a future MSA and what that may mean for governance options. We would welcome more details on how the proposals would ensure these sensible ratios. • The Reigate and Banstead and Crawley proposal does not outline a proposed devolution geography for the new proposed unitary. Under criterion 5, we would ask for information on how the proposal would unlock devolution for the wider area, particularly in the context of the proposed Sussex and Brighton MSA. • Timing-wise, we would look to explore delivering devolution alongside reorganisation as far as possible and subject to the outcome of the upcoming Spending Review. For the creation of a new MSA, mayoral elections could potentially take place in the same year as the new unitary go-live dates. For joining an existing MSA, we would typically look to align with the MSA's election cycle. • Subject to the above and timings aligning, the functions for which a future MSA would be responsible with would not require disaggregation. This would include many of the functions highlighted, including strategic planning, economic development, regeneration and skills, and employment support. • While we cannot pre-judge devolution decisions, we are happy to discuss further any eventual transition period between establishing the new unitary authorities and a potential MSA taking effect. • Across all proposals, looking towards a potential future MSA, it would be beneficial to go beyond the unlocking of devolution and provide an assessment that outlines if there are benefits and disadvantages in how each option would interact with a strategic authority and best benefit the local community. • You may also wish to include how any proposal considers the new housing and regeneration and adult skills powers being conferred by upcoming legislation to Surrey County Council as part of the recently confirmed non-mayoral agreement, and on how the area will exercise devolved functions once new unitaries are formed.
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<p>Include a summary of local engagement that has been undertaken and any views expressed, along with your further plans for wide local engagement to help shape your developing proposals.</p> <p>Relevant criteria: 6a&b) new unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We welcome your interim update against criterion 6, and the engagement undertaken so far and your plans for the future. It is for you to decide how best to engage locally in a meaningful and constructive way with residents, voluntary sector, local community groups and councils, public sector provider such health policy and fire, and business to inform your proposal. • You may wish to engage in particular with those who may be affected by disaggregation of services. It would be helpful to see detail that demonstrates how local ideas and views have been incorporated into any final proposal.
<p>Set out indicative costs of preparing proposals and standing up an implementation team as well as any arrangements proposed to coordinate potential capacity funding across the area.</p> <p>Relevant criteria: Linked to 2d) Proposals should set out how an area will seek to manage transition costs, including planning for future service transformation opportunities from existing budgets, including from the flexible use of capital receipts that can support authorities in taking forward transformation and invest-to-save projects.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We would welcome further detail in any final proposal over the level of cost and the extent to which the costs are for delivery of the unitary structures or for transformation activity that delivers benefits – noting the interim plan indicates the implementation cost covers both (see criterion 2d)
<p>Set out any voluntary arrangements that have been agreed to keep all councils involved in discussions as this work moves forward and to help balance the decisions needed now to maintain service delivery and ensure value for money for council taxpayers, with those key</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We welcome the ways of working together you have outlined in the interim plan (see criterion 4). Effective collaboration between all councils will be crucial; areas will need to build strong relationships and agree ways of working, including around effective data sharing. • This will enable you to develop a robust shared evidence base to underpin final proposals (see criterion 1c). We recommend that final proposals should use the same assumptions and data sets or be clear where and why there is a difference.

<p>decisions that will affect the future success of any new councils in the area.</p> <p>Relevant criteria: 4 a-c) Proposals should show how councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views.</p>	
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APPENDIX 7: PARTNER LETTERS OF SUPPORT



Elmbridge

Borough Council

Cllr Tim Oliver OBE
Leader of the Council
Surrey County Council

Elmbridge Borough Council
Civic Centre
High Street
Esher
Surrey KT10 9SD

Date: 23 April 2025

Dear Tim

Local Government Reorganisation - 2 Unitary option for Surrey

As we work towards final local government reorganisation (LGR) submission across the county, we wanted to take the opportunity to reaffirm our position with you, as well as provide some supplementary information that may support the options appraisal that underpins the final plan for the 2 unitary option.

Our position

We hold firm the belief that LGR wouldn't be the first choice of our residents. Whilst we recognise the benefits of streamlining and transforming services across a wider scale, the speed of the process, particularly with the exceptional Surrey timescales could put services at risk. This coupled with the significant debt across Surrey may mean that our residents are faced with increased costs. Having said that, we must still work pragmatically to achieve the best outcome for residents now that the Government has set us on this path.

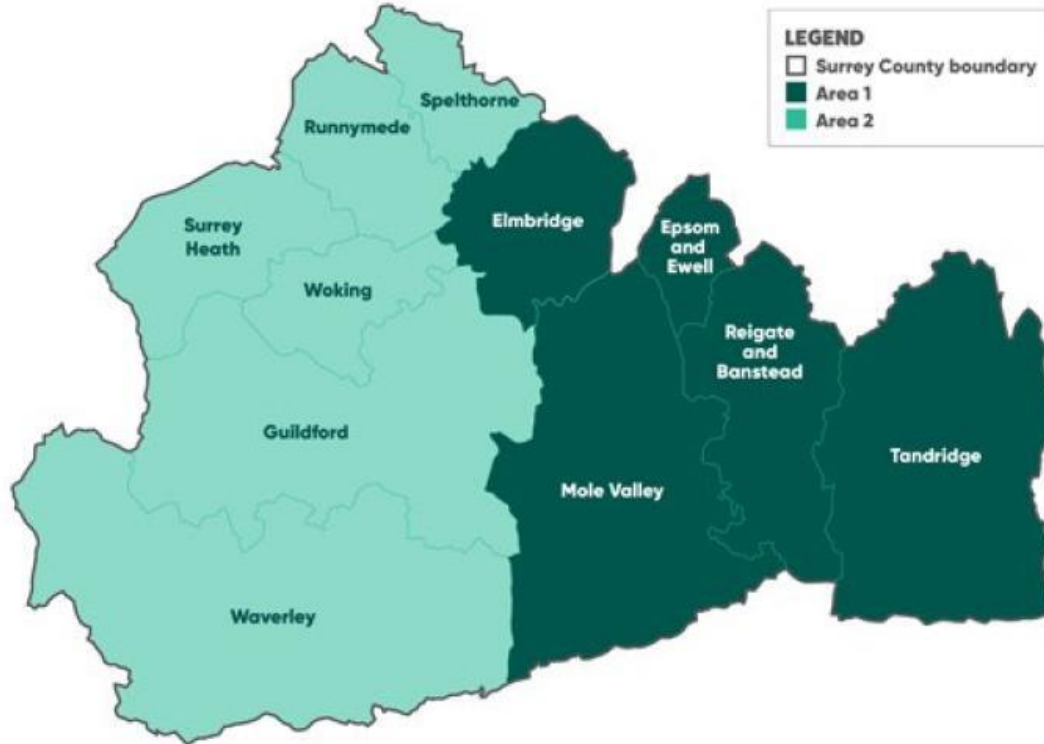
Throughout this process, Elmbridge has maintained an open-minded stance regarding the optimal number of new unitary authorities. Our primary goal is to ensure the best interests of Elmbridge, as well as Surrey as a whole. Our decision will be grounded in robust evidence and data. We will continue to analyse, research, and scrutinise all options until we are confident that the best solution for unitarisation in Surrey has been identified. We are committed to being open and transparent about our approach and the work being undertaken to reach the final submission, and this letter forms part of this approach.

The 2 unitary option

As you will have seen, we have made clear our concerns on the options for 3 unitary options being developed by some Surrey districts and boroughs. In the interest of

transparency, we would like to outline our preferred configuration for Surrey across the 2 unitary option, as well as some of the data used to support this.

Having reviewed the Surrey [interim proposal](#), we think if this is progressed, an East/West split such as the options set out below could make the most sense for Elmbridge. Our preference for this would be the 2.1 set out below.



There are a number of factors to this that we believe will help develop the proposal for two unitary councils further:

Place

The larger geographies of the proposed two unitary councils could offer more flexibility in meeting housing needs across the unitary areas. By working over a broader region, we could potentially minimise the impact on the character and appearance of Elmbridge.

Some of the key place factors that we feel support the 2.1 model for Surrey for include:

- Spelthorne is connected to Surrey Heath, Woking and Runnymede by a principal road network (A30/M3) and rail network (Reading to Waterloo).
- Spelthorne's only connection to Elmbridge is Walton Bridge. Spelthorne is severely isolated from the remainder of East Surrey.
- The physical boundary of the River Thames provides a significant barrier to communities accessing homes, jobs and services in East Surrey.
- Spelthorne's focus is connections to Runnymede, Windsor, Hounslow and Hillingdon. This is demonstrated in the travel to work, housing market and functional economic areas.

- Heathrow will dominate the economic development of Spelthorne and other west surrey authorities whereas East Surrey will look to Gatwick.

From our perspective, this is sufficient evidence to support the 2.1 model over any other in your options analysis.

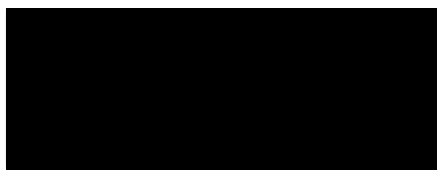
Finances

Based on the evidence published thus far, the option of two unitary councils appears to be more financially resilient. This is a crucial consideration given the combined debt level of £5.5 billion held by councils in Surrey. Make no mistake – we firmly believe that to best support the future of local government in Surrey the Government must agree to write off the stranded debt accumulated through investment in commercial property and development, and will continue to fight for this outcome. However, we also need to look practically at our options.

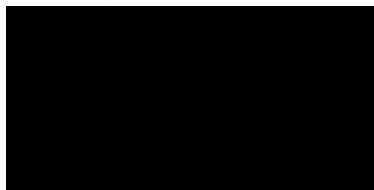
The 2.1 option minimises the number of new unitary authorities that will require significant financial support from inception, which will play a key part in streamlining local and central government engagement throughout the LGR process and going forward, especially over the issue of the exceptional debt across Surrey. There are a number of uncertainties that need to be assessed and mitigated, as per the recent [Best Value Inspection Report for Spelthorne](#), which could be better resolved across Surrey under the 2.1 configuration.

We will continue to work across the county to support the development of proposals that lead to the best results for our residents, and see the above points raised as central to our work in doing this. We look forward to seeing the final submissions in due course.

Signed,



Mike Rollings
Leader of Elmbridge Borough Council



Simon Waugh
Deputy Leader of Elmbridge Borough Council



John Cope
Leader of the Opposition, Elmbridge Borough Council

25/04/2025

Dear Cllr Tim Oliver,

I am writing to you as Chair of the Surrey Business Leaders Forum, which brings together private sector representatives from across the county to ensure a strong business voice is at the heart of local decisions impacting our regional economy.

There are close to 40 members on the forum, representing a diverse range of businesses linked to the county's economic strengths.

Representatives include Surrey-based multinationals, such as McLaren, Asahi and KONE; our growing priority sectors, such as Shepperton Studios, Fuse Games, and Surrey Satellite Technology Limited; and large anchor organisations, such as Wates Group, Gatwick, SGN, and the Animal and Plant Health Agency.

There are also high-growth SMEs, investors, property agents, and employer representative bodies, including Surrey Chambers of Commerce, Institute of Directors, Federation of Small Businesses and Surrey Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) network.

In short, the Forum represents Surrey's vibrant and diverse regional economy, which contributes close to £50 billion annually to the UK, and play a critical role in elevating the voice and role of business in local decision-making related to economic growth.

While we recognise that LGR in itself is a matter for our local authority leaders to discuss directly with yourself, on behalf of businesses across Surrey I want to re-emphasise the importance of delivering strategic economic functions on a single county footprint.

Our belief – supported by examples of devolution elsewhere, such as Greater Manchester and the West Midlands – is that business growth is dependent upon opportunities to maximise and leverage economies of scale, supporting cross-county collaboration between high-growth clusters and innovation assets.

For 15 years, Surrey was split into two Local Enterprise Partnership areas rooted in neighbouring counties. This created a complex landscape that was challenging to navigate for businesses in terms of support and access to funding.

Over the past two years, Surrey has been through a significant journey to enhance and streamline delivery of economic responsibilities to provide a more effective business support mechanism.

Working collaboratively with Surrey County Council and partners, we have used the increased powers provided by Whitehall to:

- Create an enhanced strategic direction through the recently published Surrey Economic Strategy to enable economic growth on a county level
- Launch an Economic Growth Fund focused on inclusive economic growth, with an anticipated £7 million of pooled funding in the first year for innovative and scalable projects to boost economic outcomes in Surrey
- Establish and develop significant business support on a single footprint, through the Business Surrey brand and website, to streamline and provide more effective support for local businesses
- Progress focused and targeted skills and employment support activities such as the Surrey Careers Hub, Skills Bootcamps, and the upcoming Connect to Work programme and devolved Adult Skills Fund to align with employer needs.

We would want to reinforce that to deliver the best economic outcomes for Surrey as a whole will require a continuation of strategic economic functions being delivered on a single county footprint. It is only by doing this that we can achieve the scale to maximise growth while providing capacity for meaningful targeted interventions in employment and skills.

Whichever path is taken through the Local Government Reorganisation and devolution in Surrey, future success will require collaborative working with strong and independent unitary authorities operating on functional economic areas with a fair and reasonable split of innovation assets and strategic towns.

We trust government and our local elected representatives to agree on the best way forward for the businesses, residents and communities of Surrey, ensuring that these authorities are well-placed to provide crucial, efficient and effective public services in the short and long term.

With regards,

Chris Hurren,

Partner at RSM UK and Chair of Surrey Business Leaders Forum

Tim Oliver, SCC

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24th April 2025

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM IN SURREY

Dear Tim

The Community Foundation for Surrey (CFSurrey) has had a positive relationship with Surrey County Council (SCC) since the Community Foundation was established in 2005. Throughout that time, they have been an important support and partner for our vital work.

In the early years of the Foundation, SCC provided direct funding and supported the transfer of over 30 Trusts into CFSurrey. In more recent years we have collaborated on some significant matched funding initiatives, notably the Covid19 response, the Mental Health Scale-Up fund, Strategic Transformation Programme and multiple Winter Poverty Fundraising initiatives.

Since our launch, we have also collaborated closely with the Borough and District Councils in Surrey to pool resources and expertise to target funding and support at local communities. In particular, we are grateful to those Borough and District Councils who have directly supported our many Area Funds in their local work.

With SCC, we have a strong strategic partnership and have committed to working together to bring maximum benefit and support for the communities of Surrey. Our strategic partnership is based on trust, mutual respect and an open dialogue. We continue to join up our expertise and skills for the benefit of Surrey residents wherever appropriate and have put in place solid foundations for closer working across a range of issues to improve the lives of Surrey residents.

In addition to our partnership working within Surrey's borders, we also work frequently across county borders by collaborating with other Community Foundations in the 47-member national network. This can be seen for example in our administration of the Gatwick Airport Community Fund which we do jointly with Kent and Sussex Community Foundations.



Together we can

Shaping Surrey's Future, the Interim Proposal for Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution in Surrey has been submitted to government. Leaders of all 12 Surrey councils have outlined a shared vision for Surrey, with options to split Surrey into two or three unitary councils following reorganisation. This is an important step in government's timeline, working towards elections in May 2026.

This major structural change offers a unique opportunity to improve services and support for our residents, including those who are most vulnerable. Today we heard that SCC's preferred model of 2 unitary authorities is well supported by both police and health who will be vital partners in ensuring that the transition to a new way of working is as smooth as possible and maximises the opportunity for new, improved support and services for our communities.

The Community Foundation for Surrey will work in partnership with all 12 councils to support a smooth transition to the new structure in whatever form that takes. From the Foundation's perspective we would see most merit in a single unitary authority covering the current geography of Surrey. This would be the obvious, simplest way to bring services together, gaining economies of scale whilst simplifying and minimising duplication. However, given a binary choice between two or three unitary authorities, we would support a two-unitary authority approach for simplicity and to minimise disruption to vital services supporting those most in need in our county.

We believe that the proposed model should build on the existing strategic partnership with the VCSE sector to promote greater strategic partnership by enabling dialogue between multiple public sector bodies and the VCSE sector on key strategic issues. In parallel, it will be vital to continue to encourage, grow and support engagement at the local and hyper-local level. The proposed Community Boards structure should also link through to existing structures such as the Foundation's many Area-focussed Funds, for example, to ensure that benefits of local collaboration are developed and supported.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Rebecca Bowden, CEO



Mrs Neelam Devesher DL, Chair





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Surrey
RH2 8EF

24 April 2025

Dear Tim,

I am writing to express my support for Surrey County Council's (SCC) Business Case for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). This proposal aligns with the vision set out in the [Fire Reform White Paper](#), which aims to provide the public with a direct say in who manages their local fire and rescue service, thereby improving public awareness and engagement. Surrey Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) support the proposed two unitary authority model as it is more efficient and simplifies governance structures, making it easier for SFRS to manage and respond to the needs of the community.

The Fire Reform White Paper suggests replacing the current committee-based governance found in county councils with a model where a single, directly elected individual, such as a mayor, oversees the fire and rescue service. This change is intended to make decision-making faster and more aligned with public priorities. By adopting this model, we can ensure that our governance structures are more responsive and accountable to the needs of our community.

The Fire Reform White Paper also confirms the government's intention to deliver on His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) recommendation that Chief Fire Officers (CFOs) should be afforded operational independence. LGR supports operational independence by granting CFOs the autonomy to make decisions regarding the deployment and management of resources. This flexibility allows for more responsive service delivery, ensuring that fire and rescue services can adapt to changing risks and demands effectively.

Additionally, the legal view is that services intended for the Strategic Authority model, such as SFRS, cannot be governed by one of the unitary councils. A 'shadow authority' will need to be established to govern the service until the Mayoral elections and vesting day in 2027. Following the dissolution of SCC on

31 March 2027, SFRS will require corporate functions currently provided by SCC, such as finance, HR, property and legal services. A disaggregation will be necessary to extract the service from the council as it moves to the strategic level. The disaggregation process must ensure that corporate services are aligned to the specific needs of the fire and rescue service and position the fire and rescue service to effectively respond to future challenges.

LGR is an opportunity to address any financial challenges faced by fire and rescue services within county councils by ring-fencing fire and rescue budgets. This ensures that fire and rescue services have dedicated funding to meet operational needs, providing financial stability and aligning with the White Paper's expectation of maintaining low council tax bills while ensuring that fire and rescue services are adequately resourced.

The proposed reorganisation offers several clear benefits for SFRS. It promotes collaboration between other co-terminus emergency services, facilitating better coordination and resource sharing. This ensures that services can work together seamlessly to address public safety challenges, enhancing the overall effectiveness of emergency response and delivering better outcomes for residents.

Moreover, the Fire Reform White Paper outlines the importance of fire and rescue services playing an active role in supporting wider public safety agendas, including health and crime prevention. LGR enables fire and rescue services to integrate more closely with local health and safety initiatives, ensuring a holistic approach to community safety. This integration supports the White Paper's vision of fire and rescue services contributing to broader public safety goals beyond their core functions.

SFRS will also have greater control over funding and regulatory requirements, allowing for more transparent and accountable governance. However, it is crucial to acknowledge and address the risks associated with LGR. Changes in funding structures, organisational boundaries, and regulations may pose challenges that require careful management to maintain service continuity and public trust. It is essential that we work collaboratively to navigate these risks and issues, ensuring that the transition is smooth and that the delivery of services to the public is not compromised.

In conclusion, I wholeheartedly support the LGR initiative. I am committed to a collaborative approach to ensure a successful transition and to maximise the benefits for our communities. Together, we will navigate this change effectively and enhance our service delivery.

Yours sincerely,

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of Dan Quin.

Dan Quin
Executive Director – Community Protection and Emergencies (Chief Fire Officer)



Tim De Meyer
Chief Constable

1 May 2025

Dear Cllr Oliver,

I write in respect of the proposals for reorganisation of Local Government within Surrey that are due to be submitted in the next month to Government. Following the recent briefing to partners, I wish to express my support on behalf of Surrey Police for Surrey County Council's preferred options of two unitary authorities. There are evidently many potential benefits for the public of Surrey in terms of enhanced co-ordination and delivery of services, as well as greater efficiency and value for money.

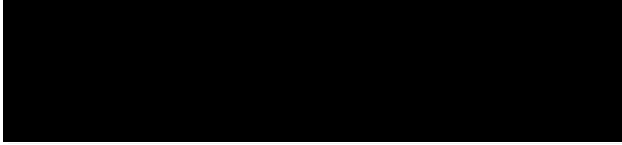
As you will be aware, following the introduction of my strategic plan for the Force in 2023 we are currently reviewing our model of operational delivery to ensure that Surrey Police is best placed to fight crime and protect people into the next decade and beyond. To this end, I am working closely with the Police and Crime Commissioner to ensure the police estate is suitably located to support the effective delivery of services to the public.

There are opportunities for strategic alignment between the Police and future local authority partners to support effective partnerships in respect of community safety and safeguarding, whilst needing to consider carefully how we work together at a local level with the dissolution of the Boroughs and Districts. An East/West split of the County broadly aligns to our current thinking for our future operating structures.

In respect of the two East/West proposals, option 2.1 that would see the existing Spelthorne Borough aligned to the West of the County would present, from a policing perspective, several operational benefits. Specifically, the connectivity between Spelthorne and the areas to the West of Surrey is far greater through both the road and rail network, leading to greater community alignment and resultant cross-over in criminality. Alongside this, the current direction of travel for the future Police estate, including custody provision, would better support the community of Spelthorne being part of a West Surrey authority.

Finally, please take this letter as my support for the unitary authority proposals set out by Surrey County Council, with a preference for option 2.1. I would also like to reiterate my commitment for Surrey Police to work closely with all partners to ensure that we make the most of this exciting opportunity to improve the services we provide to the people of Surrey.

Yours sincerely



Tim De Meyer
Chief Constable



Surrey Heartlands

Cllr Tim Oliver OBE
Leader of Surrey County Council

Sent by email to: tim.oliver@surreycc.gov.uk

Dukes Court
Duke Street
Woking
Surrey
GU1 5BH
0300 561 1555

Private and confidential

www.surreyheartlands.org

30 April 2025

Dear Tim,

Thank you for our recent discussions about the impact and opportunities Local Government Reorganisation could bring to Surrey. This is a truly exciting time for Surrey.

We are grateful to you and the team for the level of involvement and engagement – of the ICB and wider ICS partners. The ideas and proposals have been subject of discussion at a number formal and informal meetings. We have considered the proposals in the context of the great strengths and progress to date in Surrey; our joint and joined up working, our shared ambitions and delivery of the ICS Strategy.

Surrey Heartlands ICB is fully supportive of the proposal to create 2 Unitary Authorities that cover the East and West of the county. This configuration is the best alignment to the work and organisation of NHS services for the people of Surrey.

We would also like to highlight the following points:

Surrey Heartlands ICS is fully supportive of a future that would see 'whole' Surrey coterminous boundaries local authorities and NHS commissioning and delivery.

We welcome the emphasis on our pioneering work driving neighbourhood working and the Towns and Villages approach, we are committed to future development of that model. We have long recognised the synergies and opportunities that our local working brings. The benefits are clear to see and the increased emphasis in the emerging 10 year plan on neighbourhoods and the 3 shifts of care will be enhanced by local neighbourhood working.

We will be delighted to support the work over the summer to pilot the Community Boards. The concept of bringing together health, local government and Police with and in local communities is an approach that we believe will result in genuine impact and improvement.

Chair: Ian Smith
Chief Executive Officer: Karen McDowell

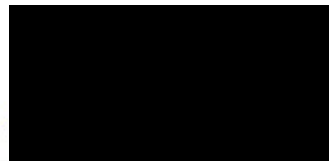
As you know we have championed closer and more integrated working and together we have made good progress and share ambitions for this to develop further. As the ICB and the wider NHS goes through changes this year we can see a future where the ICB will organise our approach to a more at scale focus in line with the proposed 2 new East:West Unitary Councils. This will complement the at scale Surrey work and the local neighbourhood working.

We do need to acknowledge the prospect of moving to a smaller number of larger ICBs which will likely require mergers, however we will ensure that even if there is functional consolidation across ICB boundaries, that we will maintain an NHS 'system' aligned with the mayoral and unitary council boundaries. We will ensure that the 'system' coterminosity and tight working relations (in this case with Surrey, and especially around the working of the ICP) will not be undermined by ICB consolidations.

Yours sincerely,



Karen McDowell
Chief Executive Surrey Heartlands ICS



Ian Smith
Chair Surrey Heartlands ICB

Cllr Tim Oliver
Leader
Surrey County Council
Via email

29th April 2025

Dear Tim,

Letter of Support for Surrey County Council's Local Government Reorganisation Plans

I write following Surrey County Council's recent briefing to partners on proposals for Local Government Reorganisation, due for submission next week to Government. I am supportive of SCC's preferred model of two unitary authorities (specifically model 2.1) and also of the emerging plans for future engagement at a local level. For the reasons you clearly cited in your presentation – simplicity for our residents; a reduced risk in the disaggregation of key services such as adult social care and children's services; more efficient and cost-effective delivery of services; better alignment to key partnership structures; unlocking of devolved powers – a two unitary structure appears to be the right model for our county.

Support for a East/West two unitary model (2.1) and alignment to future policing/estates structures

Members may be aware that Surrey Police has, for some months now, been working on a revised operating model which will look at how policing services are structured at local level to deliver a more effective and resilient service aligned to the Chief Constable's strategic plan. This review is set to define how Surrey Police will fight crime and protect people for the next decade. In tandem, we will need to look at our estate strategy to ensure that our buildings are located in the optimum locations to support any new ways of working. The dissolution of our Borough and District Councils additionally means that we will need to revisit how we police and engage with local neighbourhoods, as much of our partnership work mirrors current local government boundaries and neighbourhood teams are co-located in 7 of our 11 Borough and District Council offices, which also host a number of police front counters.

Operational policing decisions are, of course, a matter for the Chief Constable. However, I am aware from recent conversations with the Chief that there is a strong policing case for supporting the East/West model and specifically, version 2.1 where Spelthorne sits in the western unitary. In terms of road connectivity, patterns of criminality, partnership structures, and emerging estates models (including custody provision) the Spelthorne area would be better served, from a policing perspective, by being aligned to the west of the county. I would be grateful if you could draw this specific point to your members' attention and I am sure that the Chief Constable would be happy to provide more detail in due course.

Partnership and local engagement

Partnership working is at the very heart of my role as PCC and I believe a two, rather than three unitary model, allows much more effective and simplified opportunities for future engagement. Many of our strategic partnership structures - including the Criminal Justice Board, Health & Wellbeing Board, Community Safety & Prevention Board and Safeguarding Executives - currently bring together senior leaders and elected members from across Surrey and operate across the entire county. Engaging with two unitaries brings good opportunities for simplification and a reduction in the duplication of effort.

I am, like you, keen to ensure that in any future model of governance, the importance of links to the public at a very local level can be retained. I am therefore very interested in emerging plans for engaging local communities through new Community Boards. Police & Crime Commissioners are elected to be the bridge between the police and the public and I can see great potential for the link-up of our neighbourhood policing teams with partners and local communities to tackle a range of issues at a much more local level and to engage in a meaningful way.

Future Devolution and the Mayoral Strategic Authority

Finally, I would like to offer my support for a unitary model that will unlock the exciting opportunities that exist for Surrey through devolution. With 'public safety' falling under the remit of a future Mayor, I see great potential for services such as the police and fire to work more closely together. I would reiterate my request that the Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner (as distinct from Surrey Police colleagues) is engaged at an early juncture in preparations for a Mayoral Authority. It will be imperative to ensure that the transfer of functions – including assets, police estate, contracts, finances and staff – that currently sit with the Police & Crime Commissioner, are properly considered and transferred smoothly into any new authority. Ensuring that we retain the best elements of the current PCC model in any new policing governance model, including strong and visible oversight of Surrey Police, will be key to the success of any future Mayor and we are in an informed position to assist with plans in this regard. We look forward to being involved in relevant workstreams as they are established.

Yours sincerely,


Lisa Townsend
Police and Crime Commissioner for Surrey

Mr Andy Brown
Deputy Chief Executive & Executive Director Resources (S.151 Officer)
Surrey County Council
Woodhatch Road
Cockshot Hill
Reigate
Surrey RH2 8EF

22 April 2025

Dear Andy

I write following a meeting of the Devolution Cabinet Working Group at Mole Valley District Council. This cross-party group asked that I highlight some concerns to those preparing proposals while they are still under development.

With regards to the geographic areas to be covered by new councils in a two unitary model - the Group favours an East/West split with the geographic areas currently covered by Mole Valley, Reigate and Banstead, Epsom and Ewell, Tandridge and Elmbridge forming a new Eastern authority.

The Group asked me to explain that they would have significant concerns about the inclusion of Spelthorne within the East as this would result in a local government structure disproportionately focused on urban issues, potentially at the expense of rural concerns. Spelthorne, covering the least rural area, differs considerably in character from Mole Valley, which is predominantly rural. If Spelthorne were included, there is a genuine risk that rural priorities would become marginalised, with policy development and decision-making skewed towards urban interests due to the dominance of more urban areas.

To highlight the disparity, both Mole Valley and Tandridge consist largely of rural landscapes, while the remaining areas are significantly more urbanised, with Spelthorne being the most urban of them all. A unitary structure excluding Spelthorne would help maintain a more equitable balance between urban and rural concerns, ensuring that policy decisions reflect the needs of both communities. The preferred arrangement, which includes three urban districts alongside two rural ones, is considered a more effective approach to balancing population centers with their concentrated economic activity and rural areas with their dispersed populations and distinct requirements in terms of economic development and access to services.

Separately, the Group has also asked that I reiterate their view that the proposal should be based on three councillors per division rather than two. The Group believe that this level of representation is essential in order to enable councillors to deal effectively with increasing workloads, particularly in rural areas where Members have to travel long distances across their division and ensure attendance at Parish Council, Resident Association and other meetings. It should be noted that making this modification would continue to result in significantly fewer councillors across Surrey than at the current time.

Finally, many of our Members continue to have concerns regarding the inclusion within the Interim Plan of a proposal to adopt a model of whole council elections every four years. They have made it clear that they would prefer that the new organisations elect by thirds. They believe that elections by thirds makes councillors more democratically accountable and provides the electorate with a greater opportunity to be involved in decision-making.

It would also provide greater stability for the new council in terms of its membership as it reduces the risk of wholesale change within the council and allows for succession planning because there would be a mixture of new and experienced councillors on the Council.

Should you wish to discuss any of the issues raised in the letter please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



Karen Brimacombe
Chief Executive
Mole Valley District Council



Surrey Minority Ethnic Forum Ltd.

Astolat, Coniers Way,
Burpham,
Guildford
Surrey
GU4 7HL

WWW.SMEF.COM 

admin@smef.org.uk 

Tim Oliver OBE
Surrey County Council
11 Woodhatch Rd,
Cockshot Hill,
Reigate
RH2 8EF

30th April 2025

Dear Tim,

RE: Letter of Support for Local Government Reorganisation

I am writing on behalf of Surrey Minority Ethnic Forum, (SMEF) to express my full support for the proposed local government reorganisation in Surrey, specifically the recommendation to consisting of **two unitary authorities**. This proposal provides the best opportunity for greater efficiencies in the delivery of services, with reduced duplication and clearer accountability as well as an improved financial sustainability. This will enable better value for money as well as helping to simplify service delivery and accountability with clear points of contact.

The two-unitary approach strikes a necessary balance between achieving economies of scale and maintaining local identity and democratic access. It would allow for more coherent planning and integrated service delivery while preserving the distinctiveness of Surrey's diverse communities. This is a once in lifetime opportunity to strengthen and align public services in the county and we welcome the inclusion of police and health partners in developing this proposal.

The inclusion of community boards in the proposal will help to strengthen connectivity with local communities. SMEF can play a vital role in connecting local diverse communities into these boards.

SMEF has had a strong relationship with Surrey County Council (SCC) since SMEF was established in 2013. SCC has played a vital role in SMEF's development and has supported SMEF to put a spotlight on inequity and minority ethnic needs and aspirations. SMEF also has a strategic relationship with SCC which is vital to enabling a strong focusing equity and promote a strategic response to addressing inequity in the county. SCC has also provided funding support, helping to strengthen local diverse communities and address issues of access and inequity to public services.

Surrey Minority Ethnic Forum is a race equalities organisation with registered charitable company status, set up to advocate for the needs and aspirations of Surrey's ethnic minority population. It is a membership organisation and has 55 community group members representing the diversity of Surrey's communities.

Yours sincerely,



Neelam Deveshar
Chair to the Board of Trustees at Surrey Minority Ethnic Forum

Tim Oliver
Leader, Surrey County Council

Luminus Insight CIC,
GF21 Astolat,
Coniers Way,
Burpham,
Surrey
GU4 7HL

6 May 2025

Dear Tim,

Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation in Surrey provide an exciting opportunity to make a step change in how public services involve, engage with and serve their local communities. This letter provides the current view of Luminus Insight CIC on the proposed changes. It is the opinion of our organisation as a provider of voice services in Surrey, and is not intended to attempt to represent any views that Surrey residents may have.

Luminus Insight CIC runs a number of different services for Surrey County Council which are designed to ensure that the voices and experiences of Surrey residents are baked into the design and delivery of local services, thereby ensuring their needs are met. We specialise in amplifying the voices of those who tend to be less well heard via formal feedback and engagement mechanisms. We run services to give Surrey's unpaid carers a voice (**Giving Carers a Voice**) and people who use substances or are affected by substance abuse (**Combating Drugs Partnership Public Involvement**), as well as giving all Surrey users of NHS and social care services an independent voice via our **Healthwatch Surrey** service with its statutory responsibilities. We have had a positive and collaborative relationship with Surrey County Council (SCC) for many years since the establishment of Healthwatch in 2013, and welcome the commitment SCC has shown to supporting an independent channel for ensuring all voices are heard.

In terms of the Luminus vision and the raison d'être of our Community Interest Company, the things that matter most to us and against which any change needs to be evaluated are:

- Ensuring communities have a strong say in how services are delivered.

- Ensuring everyone has an opportunity to have their voice heard – particularly those who are at risk of health inequalities; who may not engage with formal feedback and engagement mechanisms; who may need advocacy support to have their views expressed.
- Ensuring those who design and deliver services hear and act on insight from local people, and use a robust and inclusive approach to understand local needs in order to design those services.

We have paid close attention to the development of proposals for devolution and LGR in Surrey, attending partner briefings and working through the VCSE Alliance to try to understand the implications for our organisation and services, the wider VCSE sector, and, most importantly, Surrey residents and the services which aim to help their wellbeing. As the main provider of independent voice services in Surrey, we believe that the proposals for reorganisation of local government in Surrey offer an exciting opportunity to increase the influence of local voices, leading to improved experiences for local people, alongside some risks which will need to be carefully managed. That said, there is so much change going on at the moment within the NHS, SCC and within the Healthwatch commissioning landscape, that any view Luminus expresses at this stage may be subject to change (for example the Dash review of patient safety bodies may have an impact on the function of local Healthwatch going forward).

Opportunities for local Healthwatch

As the provider of the Surrey-wide local Healthwatch, we conduct both Surrey-wide projects on specific topics, and localised community engagement. It is often the case that we struggle to find the right audience for both aspects of our work, and end up “touting” our findings and recommendations around, trying to find the audience with the power to respond/act – be that Surrey-wide boards and committees, Place-based alliances, PCN-level activity etc. The current lack of co-terminosity across NHS and social care services increases the complexity and inefficiency of our influencing work. This is very resource-intensive and does not always lead to impact and improvement based on the lived experiences of Surrey residents. It can also inhibit the fulfilment of our statutory functions (such as deployment of Enter and View powers or obtaining responses to our recommendations).

We can see that a proposal to reorganise as two or more unitaries provides an opportunity to alleviate some of this challenge, and therefore increase our ability to ensure local people are at the heart of design and delivery of local services in a number of ways:

- 1) It is our understanding that each unitary will have to commission a local Healthwatch. The fact that each unitary will be on a smaller footprint than Surrey should mean that projects undertaken and experiences gathered by

that Healthwatch may find more traction and better reflect the needs and views of the local population. Closer relationships with partners should mean greater response to use of our statutory powers.

- 2) The requirement on local Healthwatch to promote the involvement of local people in the design and delivery of local services will be more manageable due to the smaller footprint, enabling a more intimate knowledge of the local area.
- 3) The smaller footprint will make it easier for local Healthwatch to liaise with other system partners who are involved in community engagement, such as Local Area Coordinators and health colleagues conducting engagement, thereby reducing duplication and enhancing opportunities for sharing insight.
- 4) Alignment of local authority footprints with NHS structures will increase our ability to build relationships and influence in a more unified and efficient manner.

However, we are also very mindful that across England, very small Healthwatch providers with limited funding find it hard to fulfil their statutory functions and amplify local voices effectively. So, the benefits of a smaller footprint outlined above need to be balanced against a size/budget that makes a local Healthwatch service viable and influential. We are aware that in some areas which have already been through reorganisation, one lead provider runs a number of local Healthwatch services, thereby providing economies of scale and aligning in a more sensible way with the experiences of patients and the public, who travel and use services from neighbouring geographies.

Opportunities for Giving Carers A Voice and Combatting Drugs Partnership Public Involvement service

Luminus believes that the benefits outlined above for delivery of the local Healthwatch service apply in a similar way to our services to give unpaid carers and people affected by substance use a voice. A smaller footprint, closer relationships, co-terminosity of boundaries should all lead to greater influence.

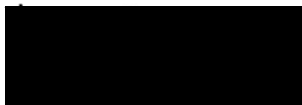
Community Boards

The aspect we find particularly exciting about the current proposal is the opportunity provided by the Community Boards for more innovative and inclusive community engagement than we have at present, based around geographies that resonate with residents. Done well, these Boards could provide residents with an influential opportunity to have their voices heard and become genuinely involved with their local democratic processes. However, it is our experience that many residents at risk of health inequalities (e.g. unpaid carers, people from minoritised communities, people with long term health conditions etc) are unlikely to get involved with traditional engagement functions (due to time and resource constraints; ill health; lack of trust and faith in making a difference amongst other things). Currently in

Surrey there are some Surrey-wide services which are designed to ensure some of these voices are heard (such as Giving Carers a Voice and Public Involvement in the Combatting Drugs Partnership). As the Community Boards develop it will be important to ensure that these less-heard voices are not lost in favour of those who are more sharp-elbowed.

Luminus (Home of Healthwatch Surrey) stands ready and eager to play an active role in the development of the Community Boards, bringing both insight and expertise in community engagement.

Yours sincerely,



Kate Scribbins
Chief Executive