

SURREY SPLITS by David Talbot

The Government has decided to move to a unitary local government for Surrey. You may be aware that we currently have a two-tier local government structure with Surrey County Council looking after our roads etc and Reigate and Banstead Borough Council looking after our bins etc. Following the move we would just have a single council structure looking after us.

The make up for the new unitary councils is under discussion with a number of different possibilities, the main suggestions from Surrey County Council being as shown (right).

The main suggestion from the Borough County Councils is shown below right.

These options are being further progressed with a final proposal to central Government by 9th May. Please see Catalina Vassallo-Bonner's article overleaf.

Option 1
East/West



Option 2
East/West



Option 3
North/South



Option 4
North/South



SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL AND DEVOLUTION by Catalina Vassallo-Bonner

Today, Reigate and Banstead has three councillors per ward. Surrey has four councillors above the M25. Devolution could mean changing to two councillors covering each ward. Local elections in May 2026, will provide two 'new' councillors for each ward. May 2027, a probable election for a mayor. It is possible (not yet confirmed by Government) that the (2026) newly elected unitary councillors may 'shadow' the existing councillors (borough and county) between 2026 and 2027 so that service delivery is not disrupted during the transition and reorganisation.

HM Government wants to extend unitary councils across England. A unitary council has responsibility for all county and borough services in its area, led by a mayor who has overall strategic and financial control and acts as an ambassador for the county. The mayor is elected by a public vote not by the councillors. A joint authority (established by the Local Government Act 1985) enables two or more councils to collaborate and take collective decisions particularly for services like fire, police and public transport. Government believes that unitary local authorities create more effective and sustainable local government. Council services are more streamlined and seamless compared with the current two-tier arrangements.

Surrey County Council submitted the first part of its application (The Interim Plan) to the Department for Local Government and English Devolution (DLG&ED) on March 21st, the second and final part will be submitted by May 9th. The DLG&ED decision will be made in the autumn.

The proposals in the Interim Plan include the boundaries and structures of the new councils to best enable delivery of high-quality, sustainable public services and efficiency savings. There are three proposals:

- A single unitary authority covering all of Surrey and population of over 1.2 million people.
- Two unitary authorities, each covering populations of between 500,000 and 600,000 (favoured by Surrey).
- Three unitary authorities, each covering populations of upwards of 350,000 and 450,000 (favoured by the 11 boroughs).

Options 2 and 3 will require immediate Exceptional Financial Support as the financial status of most of the existing boroughs and especially Woking, owing over £2 billion is of major concern. The DLG&ED advocates selling assets across the boroughs instead. Reigate and Banstead is the only borough without debt.